COMICS FEATURE

INTERVIEWS

Collector's Edition No. 1

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JIM STARLIN
INTERVIEWED

A TALK WITH
FRANK MILLER

THE LOST
JOHN BYRNE

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COMICS FEATURE SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S EDITION NUMBER 1

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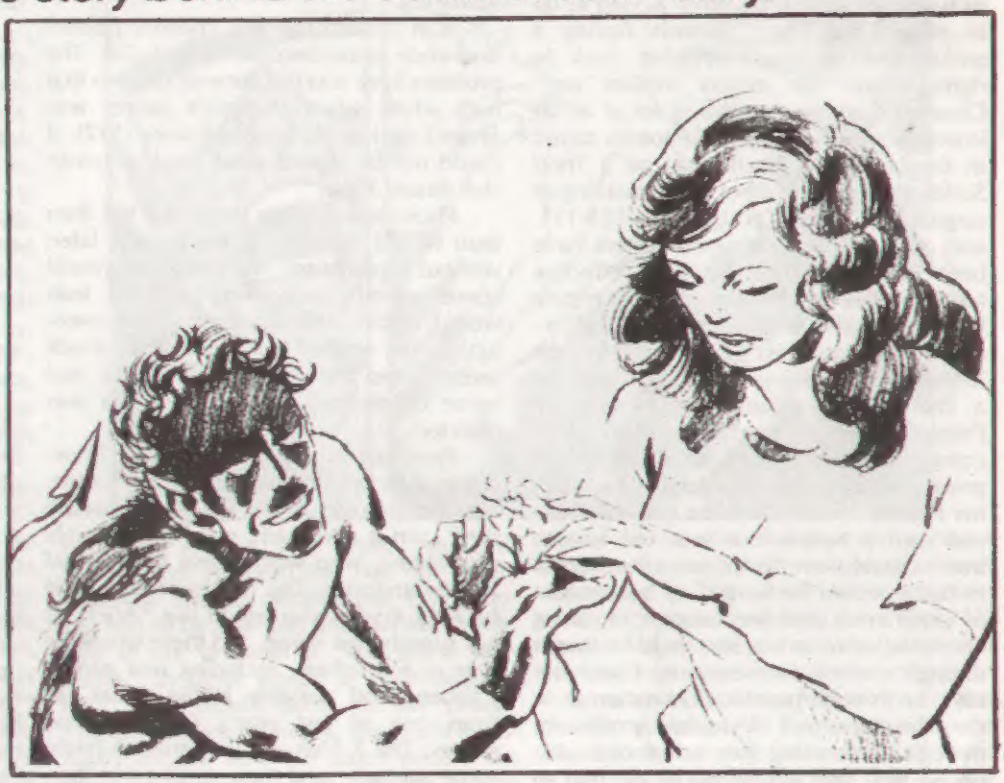
The Many Alternate Fates of the Phoenix

The complete story behind the death of Jean Grey

by Peter Sanderson



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By now *X-Men* readers are well aware that Jean Grey, who was Marvel Girl in the original X-Men and Phoenix in the current group, committed suicide in last month's conclusion to the "Dark Phoenix" saga (issue 137). What readers may not know is that the "Dark Phoenix" storyline had been planned nearly two years ago, and that numerous possible conclusions had been considered and discarded. In fact, issue 137 was originally completely pencilled and scripted with an ending in which Jean Grey survived. The present conclusion, in which she dies, was substituted at the last minute. *Comics Feature* wishes to thank Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter, *X-Men* penciller/co-plotter John Byrne and *X-Men* co-plotter/scripter Chris Claremont for allowing us to publish some of the artwork from the original ending in these pages.

To understand the course of events that led to the decision that Jean had to die in 137, we must look back to the decision to turn her into Phoenix in the first place. Len Wein and Dave Cockrum, the creators of the "new" *X-Men* series, wrote Jean out of the book in issue 94 along with all the other original X-Men except Scott Summers (Cyclops). When Chris Claremont began plotting the book, he asked Cockrum to bring her back in issue 97, but to make her look like "a young, sophisticated New York collegian" instead of retaining what Claremont terms her former "young middle-American Republican" look. Drawing her this new way made Cockrum enthusiastic about the character. He and Claremont decided to change her superheroic name (since "Marvel Girl" sounded too much like the "Ms. Marvel" character then being planned), to change her costume to give her a more striking appearance, and to upgrade her powers to make her comparable to the group's other female member, Storm.

Claremont says that he wanted to make Phoenix "a female analogue to Thor, Firelord and the Silver Surfer," and thus a heroine on a "cosmic" level of power. He and Cockrum intended that the more she used her power, the more she would become like a god. In fact, she would become a "power junkie," who enjoyed the rush of pleasure exercising her power would bring. This fact, Claremont says, would lead to some interesting storylines. If she used a great deal of her power before she had learned how to control that much of it, she might accidentally wreck havoc. Moreover, if she unleashed even more of this power before she was fully prepared to handle it, her passion for using her power might unbalance her mind as it eventually did in the "Dark Phoenix" serial. Therefore, the X-Men's mentor, Professor Xavier, would have to train her in the use of her powers. Shooter believes that the concept of the X-Men as a school for super-powered mutants is fundamental to the series' appeal, but Byrne and Claremont agree that the current X-Men do not need schooling since except for Colossus they had all been using their powers for years before the new team was formed. Claremont saw the training of Phoenix as a means of bringing back the "school" motif. Moreover, he envisioned creating situations in which Jean was caught between her need to use her powers to rescue the other X-Men, and her awareness of the dangers that using it could create.

When *X-Men* went monthly, Cockrum left the book and John Byrne took over. Byrne had and still has fundamental objections to Jean's Phoenix persona. "It's not that I don't like Jean Grey," he explains. "I have an abiding fondness for redheads, and have been in love with Jean since we first 'met,' about a million years ago when I was thirteen." Byrne saw Marvel Girl in the original series as a heroine who pulled her own weight in battle with the team (thereby contrasting, he points out, with Sue Storm of the Fantastic Four), without making a big deal out of the fact.

On the other hand, Byrne regards Phoenix as "too brassy, too loud, too hip and feministic," and hence not in keeping with the personality he feels was established for Jean in the "old" *X-Men* series. Claremont agrees that his treatment of Jean's personality differs from Stan Lee's and Jack Kirby's in the early issues, but says that Jean was becoming more assertive in the issues on which Roy Thomas and Neal Adams collaborated. Claremont says that he relates to the Jean Grey of the latter stories rather than the earlier ones. Besides, he continues, anyone who has been a superheroine for at least seven years of "Marvel-time" would naturally have become more assertive by now.

Byrne does not see why there should be another "strong female character" (in terms of both powers and personality) in the X-Men when they already have Storm. Claremont, on the other hand, attacks what he sees as a double standard in comics that decrees that "a superhero group can have an infinite number of

strong males, but not two strong females." Byrne argues that the male X-Men do not have equally assertive personalities, and contrasts Colossus and Nightcrawler with Wolverine.

As for strength as measured in terms of sheer power, Byrne believes that Phoenix was too powerful to be a number of a superhero group. She had, after all, saved the entire universe in issue 108. What would there be for the other X-Men to do in stories that had "Phoenix flexing a pinkie and putting everything back to rights while the others looked on?" Claremont argues that this is not at all an insurmountable problem. If Phoenix stayed in the book, she would stay on a Thor/Surfer power level rather than equalling or surpassing Galactus as she did in 135-137, and, Claremont points out, writers have been able to come up with effective adversaries even for the Surfer. Keeping Phoenix in the book would simply "require a better class of villain" for the X-Men. and "making the villains work for a change." A villain on the order of Proteus could be used, or villains could come up with means of draining her power, he contends. Moreover, "for all of her Phoenix-like ability, she was still heart and soul a twenty-four year old woman from upstate New York;" her effectiveness in battle would be limited by her amount of experience and her courage in facing horrifying adversaries. She could be fought through mental disorientation, Claremont says, or through psychic domination as in the Mesmero and Wyngarde stories, or through threatening her loved ones. He notes, too, she would be aware that to unleash too much power at the stage of her life and training would be to risk losing control of it and even turning into the evil Dark Phoenix. Byrne maintains, however, that as long as Phoenix was around, "the X-Men had become guest stars in their own book."

When Claremont decided to have the Beast and one of the X-Men get separated from the others at the finale of the Magneto story in 113, Byrne suggested it be Phoenix. As a result, Phoenix was out of the book for nine issues. Still, the problem of what to do with her had only been postponed, and as the time for her return approached, Byrne began losing interest in the book.

X-Men's editor also felt that Phoenix should not be a member of the team, and Claremont decided that he did not want to make Byrne "do a character he's uncomfortable with" and so "there's no sense in keeping her around." But then what would be done with her?

Marvel writer Steven Grant supplied the key by proposing that Phoenix become a villain. Claremont had already decided to bring in the Hellfire Club. Byrne suggested using Mastermind and having Jean psychically enthralled, whereupon Claremont decided to have him turn her into the decadent Black Queen. "Almost simultaneously," both co-plotters seized upon Grant's idea for the next plot development: Jean's psychological transformation into a villainess would be permanent, and the Black Queen would become the cosmic-powered Dark Phoenix.

But then what would happen to Dark Phoenix? Byrne and Claremont devised at least seven different scenarios, four of which were constructed over the course of three nights! Among them were the following.

Jean would lose her Phoenix powers and once again become Marvel Girl. The problem here was the same as the one that had arisen when Phoenix's power was limited during the Magneto story (112): it could not be agreed what level of power she should have.

Phoenix would be destroyed but then Jean would show up a few months later, without explanation. The characters would spend months wondering whether Jean would again turn on them, and eventually she would. Jean's eventual attack seemed too inevitable to create a real sense of mystery, and so this idea was rejected.

Professor Xavier would destroy Phoenix in their psychic battle, and the X-Men, horrified, would break up. Xavier would then form a new team, consisting entirely of children, who would wear the original X-Men uniforms. The first member would be Kitty Pryde, who would use "Ariel" as her superheroic name, and there would be four or five others, including one named Caliban, and possibly Willie Evans, Jr. from one of last year's *Fantastic Four* stories. The X-Men would reunite to battle some menace, and then remain together, but the children would continue to stay, receiving training from Xavier and sometimes accompanying their elders on missions. Again, this would be a way of restoring the "school" aspect to the series. However, the co-plotters feared that the children's team would turn into a "Legion of Substitute X-Men" and dismissed this idea. Kitty, of course, is still being used, and she will now probably be called "Sprite" (not to be confused with the Eternal of the same name).

Xavier would turn Jean's mind back to the level of a ten year old's. Since she had not yet developed her Marvel Girl powers at that age, the Phoenix would remain dormant, and Xavier would try to devise a way to control it. Meanwhile, Jean would in effect have been mentally retarded, and so she would be entrusted to the care of her sister. One day, however, she would wander off and be attacked by some would-be rapists. Her fear and anger would transform her back into Dark Phoenix, who would then somehow have to be disposed of permanently.

Xavier would seemingly destroy Phoenix in psychic combat, but because Phoenix is pure energy, which cannot be destroyed, she would one day rematerialize and team up with Magneto. Byrne, however, came to reject the idea of making Phoenix a recurring villain because she would be too powerful for the X-Men to beat. Both Byrne and Claremont felt more comfortable in permitting her to retain something of her heroic nature.

Phoenix would be destroyed and Scott would quit the X-Men for a time "to find out what had gone wrong with his life."

Finally Claremont and Byrne settled on a plot that became the original version of issue 137. It differs from the version that ultimately saw print at the point at which Scott and Jean alone are fighting off Lilandra's Imperial Guard. The two of them are defeated, and the scene shifts back to Lilandra's starship. Jean is placed (in a crucifixion position) atop a platform and is subjected to rays of energy that perform a "psychic lobotomy" on her. This is to say that the parts of her brain that make possible her psionic abilities are removed. So too are her aggressive drives, which make the Phoenix power work. When the "operation" is finished, all traces of Jean's super-

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powers have been removed; even her telepathic rapport with Scott has been destroyed. Her personality has changed too: she is now almost wholly passive. Lilandra tries to apologize to Scott for having had to do this to Jean to safeguard the universe, but Scott angrily snaps at her, "Haven't you done enough?", and carries Jean away, followed by the other X-Men. The Watcher and the Recorder offer some observations to the reader in the final two panels.

The next issue, 138, contained Scott's reminiscences about the history of the X-Men as he and Jean wandered through the woods near Professor Xavier's mansion. They then walk over to talk to the other X-Men, who are enjoying themselves in the swimming pool, and tell Xavier that they feel they have to go away for a while to come to terms with what has happened to them. Over the next several months, Jean would slowly regain her normal personality. As Scott and Jean drive away, Wolverine, who also loved Jean, turns away from the window with a tear in his eye. Finally, in the last panel, Kitty Pryde appears, ready to start her new life at Xavier's school.

Issues 137 and 138 had been completely pencilled, 137 entirely scripted, and all but one page of 137 lettered when the change in the Dark Phoenix denouement had to be made. Editor-in-chief Jim Shooter had been aware that Claremont and Byrne had continually been reworking Phoenix's fate, but he told Jim Salicrup, who was then *X-Men* editor, "As long as it's good, I don't care what it is, do it." When he said that, Shooter never expected that Dark Phoenix would end up destroying a planet inhabited by five billion people and a manned starship as well, thereby, in his words, becoming "the biggest mass murderer in history." Byrne claims credit for the idea of having Phoenix destroy an inhabited planet, although Claremont is not sure which of the two of them came up with it. Claremont says he thinks he had told Shooter about the planet being destroyed, but Shooter does not recall this. (The "asparagus people" that Dark Phoenix destroyed had previously appeared in *Avengers* 4, by the way.)

When Shooter saw the scene of the planet's destruction in the "make-ready" (a coverless copy that comes into the office a week or so before the book goes on sale) of issue 135, he asked to see the work for 136, which was already inked and lettered, and for 137, which had already been pencilled and nearly completely lettered. Shooter feels that the destruction of the inhabited planet was totally "gratuitous" but at that point it was too late to change 135, which had already been printed, and he did not want to strain the story's credibility by bringing the five billion "asparagus people" back from the dead somehow in a later issue. Since Jean had committed so horrific an act, Shooter believed that justice demanded that she pay the severest of penalties. The "psychic lobotomy," he decided, was insufficient

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because, after it was done, Jean still retained her freedom and was not visibly suffering. Shooter decided that 137's ending had to be changed and that Jean either had to die or suffer a "fate worse than death," in other words, a "technological hell" that would serve as her prison. Possibly, Shooter thought, she could eventually escape from the space prison, but then she would have to be seen by the readers as an outright villain. "I could have almost accepted a Dark Phoenix if she was a totally despicable monster," Shooter explains. "The key thing that made it unacceptable" were her moral "flipflops" between her moral Jean self and her Dark Phoenix self. Claremont disliked the space prison idea, believing that to be true to his characters, he would then have to have the X-Men devote their full time to trying to break Jean out of the prison. Then if they succeeded, Lilandra would go after Jean to imprison her again, and a never-ending cycle would be set up. Shooter meanwhile ultimately decided that even the "man-made hell" of a prison was insufficient punishment for such a monumentally heinous crime, and so he insisted on Jean's death. Claremont decided that Lilandra would execute Jean rather than "lobotomize" her, but Shooter pointed out that the X-Men would never just stand by while Jean was killed. Instead, Shooter decided that she should commit suicide.

At first Byrne and Claremont thought that all of 137 would have to be redone, and refused to do it. Shooter gave 137 to current *X-Men* editor Louise Jones, who had talks with him, Claremont and Byrne about the matter, and it was finally agreed that a new final six pages would be plotted and drawn for 137, and that Claremont would rewrite the dialogue and captions for the entire issue. The lengthly flashback sequences in 138 would not be redrawn (except for those recapping the end of 137) but the framing sequences would be, and the latter are now set at Jean's funeral.

Byrne and Claremont both point out that they do not object to the fact that Shooter insisted on changing the ending and that it is his duty to do so if he feels they made a mistake. Claremont believes that the planet's annihilation "made the issue more effective" but agrees that "from a schematic standpoint the death of the asparagus race was gratuitous, icing on the cake." He explains that he could have had Dark Phoenix destroy a star with uninhabited planets and the point would still have been made, to Lilandra and to the readers, that Dark Phoenix posed a threat to life in the universe. Nevertheless, Claremont is unhappy with the new denouement. Referring to Shooter, he states "It was Jim's decision; it was the system's fault. Jim was perfectly justified in doing what he did. He saw what he thought was a major thematic flaw, and acted to prevent it. What I object to is the fact that the system didn't catch it sooner." The destruction of the planet was "something that would have required a minor art and script change" in 135 that could have been made had the problem been caught in time. Since it was not, the result is that they have had to "kill off one of the oldest characters and the second oldest romantic relationship in Marvel Comics. It was unnecessary."

For his part, Shooter declares that this was "the first time I've interfered with anyone's story" by "giving an edict" and otherwise commends the "Dark Phoenix" epic as a good "cosmic adventure" story.

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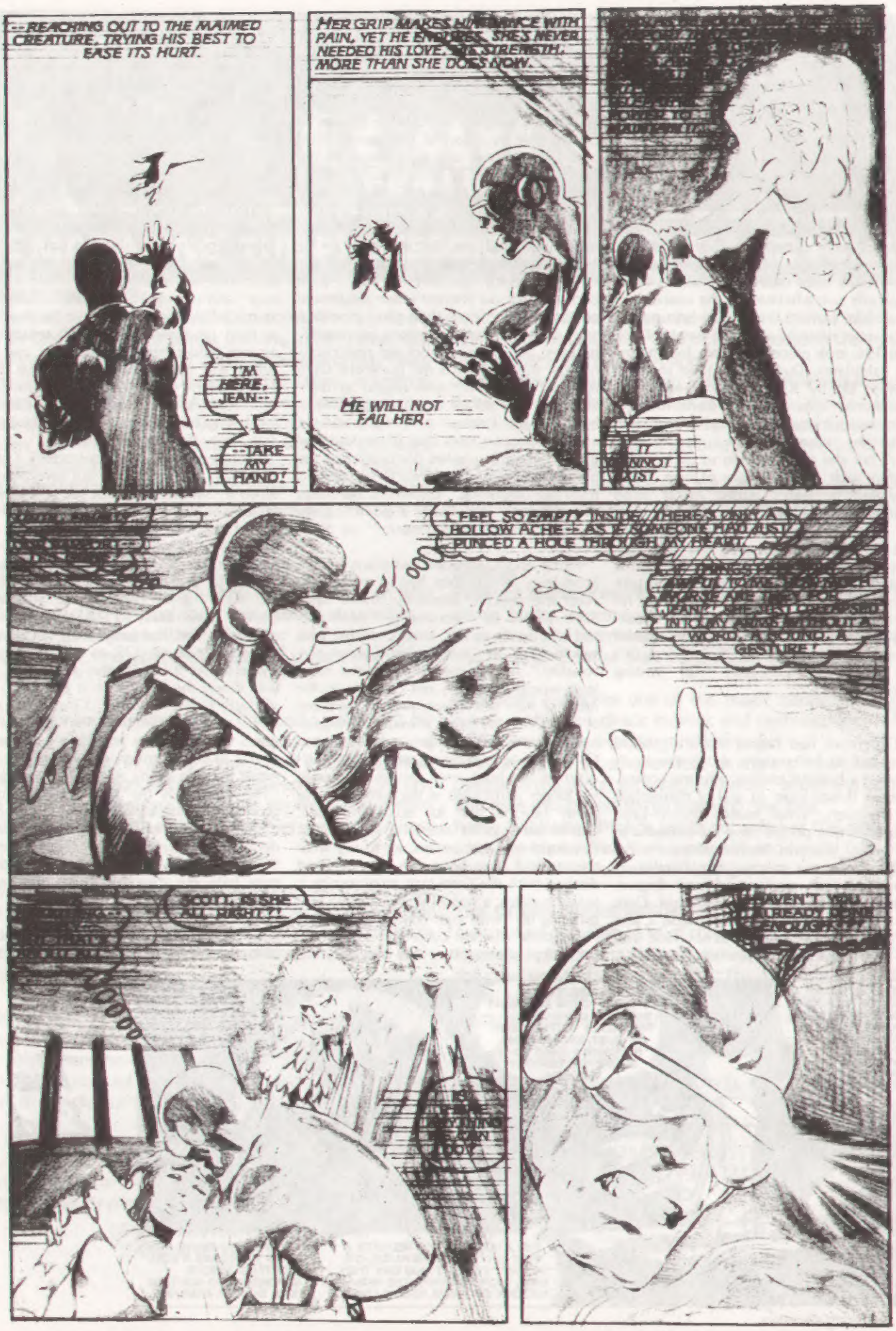
The issue of whether or not Jean had to die comes down to the question of her responsibility for her actions as Dark Phoenix. As Shooter observes, it is "a real philosophical nut to crack." Byrne reports that he himself "never thought of Dark Phoenix as insane." To his mind, Jean had the "power of moral choice" as Dark Phoenix and was "quite aware" of what she was doing and "willing" to do it. "She's responsible for both sides of herself," Byrne asserts, but he concedes that when Jean is exposed to the rush of power that comes from being Dark Phoenix, she has no other option but to "choose and enjoy evil." But perhaps the real question is whether or not she submitted to Wyngarde's temptations, which brought out the dark side of her personality, voluntarily. Byrne believes that she did, that "she could have turned them down" but she "enjoyed" the "timeslip" visions and did not, although Byrne allows that this was "not underlined perhaps" in the stories.

Claremont takes an entirely different interpretation. He sees Jean as having been both repelled and "fascinated" by the evil she witnessed in her visions, but asserts that Jean did not think of these visions as real. He says Jean thought she


--REACHING OUT TO THE MAIMED CREATURE, TRYING HIS BEST TO EASE ITS HURT.
I'M HERE, JEAN--
--TAKE MY HAND!
HER GRIP MAKES HIM WINCE WITH PAIN, YET HE ENDURES. SHE'S NEVER NEEDED HIS LOVE, HIS STRENGTH, MORE THAN SHE DOES NOW.
HE WILL NOT FAIL HER.
I FEEL SO EMPTY INSIDE. THERE'S ONLY A HOLLOW ACHE--AS IF SOMEONE HAD JUST PUNCED A HOLE THROUGH MY HEART.
SCOTT, IS SHE ALL RIGHT?!
HAVEN'T YOU ALREADY DONE ENOUGH?!
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was merely having something like a "bad dream" in which she was "just watching" the actions of an ancestor who "wasn't her." "I'm doing nasty things," Claremont says Jean thought, "but it's not real." Before she realized it, Mastermind had turned her into the Black Queen, the damage to the balance of good and evil in her mind had been done, and her transformation into Dark Phoenix had been triggered. "Mastermind set an unstoppable, uncontrollable series of events into action," says Claremont. "He pulled the graphite rods out of a nuclear reactor." The result was that "Jean was briefly, tragically overwhelmed by the assumption of godlike power; she was swept up by a tidal wave of emotion." The events of 135 and 136 took place over only four hours, he calculates. During that time she was "swept up by forces within herself she could not control" and went into "a Conan-esque berserker rage." It would taske her "time to regain control of herself" but she could not do so on her own within such a short space of time. What was left of Jean's buried moral sense within her made her seek out her parents for help, and prevented her from killing the X-Men, although she did not consciously realize that. Claremont asserts that Scott could have helped Jean to take control of herself had Xavier not reawakened Dark Phoenix's fury by attacking her. Claremont is not certain that all of this came across to the readers; it's the trouble, he concedes, with "writing subtexts."

Claremont had hoped that 137 would turn out to be a story about mercy. "I wanted a hopeful ending, a happy ending. Certain things must in and of themselves be forgiven. What makes Marvel-Earth special is that people have the potential to do great, but also horrible things. What differentiates our species from Lilandra's is that they can understand and forgive. Jean's friends and Lilandra saw Dark Phoenix for what it was, understood it, and forgave Jean, because it was not done with an awareness of what she was doing."

Byrne did not feel when he drew the destruction of the planet that Jean would have to die because of it, and Claremont believes that Jean was severely punished even in 137's original ending. First, he says, for a telepath to lose her powers is comparable to a normal man going blind and deaf. Second, she would have to live with the memory of what she had done. Would that prove to be too much for her? Claremont thinks Jean would have felt that "the best way to make up for this is to live, remember, and use her power [if it returned] for the benefit of people."

The differing opinions on Jean's guilt perhaps bear out Shooter's own judgement on the matter. "It might be good to write a story in which these questions are raised," he says, and he would not put restrictions on the way in which the questions were resolved. However, with regard to Dark Phoenix, "the set-up was inadequate for a base for the kind of story we're talking about." Shooter feels that Claremont and Byrne "literally ignored demonstrating the possibility of insanity. It had to be planned from the beginning." Claremont concedes that "Shooter may have a point" about "establishing [Jean's] insanity" as Dark Phoenix.

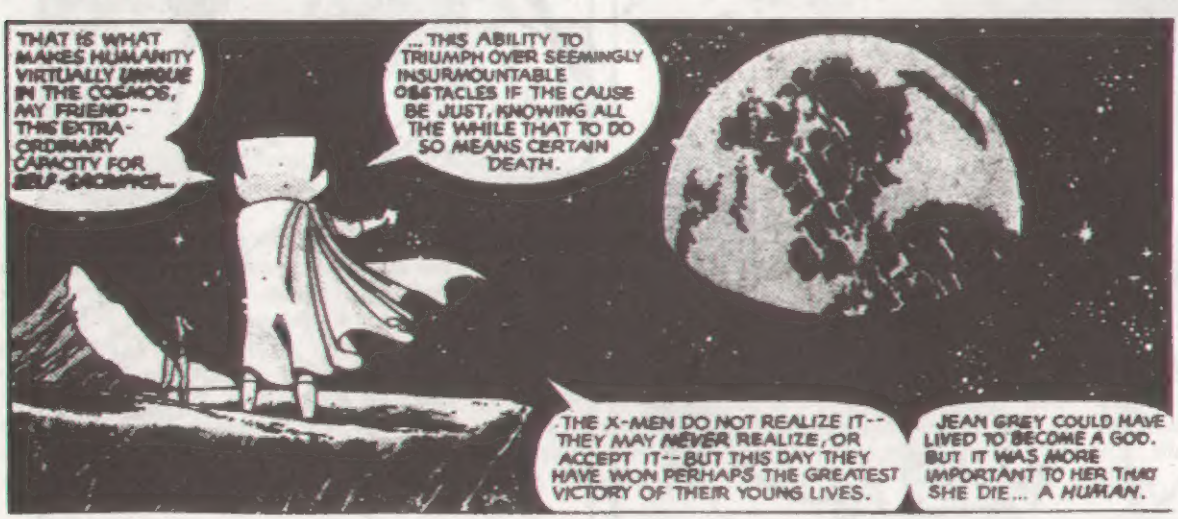
Byrne and Claremont had plans for the Scott-Jean relationship had it continued. After the psychic lobotomy, Byrne says, Scott would be "wondering if Jean was still the woman he loved" while Jean would have to "relearn her former personality." In the meantime, Byrne says, Jean would decidedly not conform to the mold of the "self-reliant, strong Claremont Woman." Byrne thinks it would have been an interesting challenge to himself and Claremont to keep Jean as a major character in the book even though she could no longer participate in the battles. As for plans beyond that for Scott and Jean, Claremont says he intended some major developments, but prefers not to say what they would have been. He says he liked dealing with the Scott-Jean relationship: it was, he states, a way of showing "two kids growing up" with their powers acting as a "metaphor" for the careers and potential for independent action that they have as adults, and their psychic rapport serving as an "exercise in trust."

As for Scott without Jean, Claremont comments that the worst loss that anyone could suffer is "the death of a beloved spouse" and "Jean is his spouse; they were married in all but name. Her death cuts the living heart from him." Scott will "become darker, grimmer again," observes Byrne, who feels that it is Scott's "brooding character" that creates much of his appeal to readers. "He could develop strength out of this" loss he has suffered, Byrne speculates, and Claremont agrees that Scott has undergone a "rite of passage" and emerged as "a man, no longer a young adult." Scott will leave the team for at least six issues; Storm will reluctantly assume leadership in his absence, and the Angel will rejoin the team at least until Scott's return. Claremont does not envision Scott forming a new romantic relationship for a long time, although Byrne thinks he may "play the field" for a while.

Will Jean ever be resurrected? Claremont says he has figured out several ways to do it. Shooter does not see any way in which she could be brought back that he would approve, but he does not rule out the possibility of resurrecting her. Byrne, however, feels strongly that it would "really be a cheat to the readers to bring her back," as he believes the cloning of the late Gwen Stacy in *Spider-Man* was.

What is the final judgement of the concerned parties on 137 as it now stands? Byrne thinks it is "a better product all the way down the line" than it was, with "a visually better ending." Claremont and Jones agree that it is a "stronger" story now, and Shooter and Byrne hope it proves to be controversial since that would mean it had a strong effect on the readers. "The ending is the best possible compromise considering all the circumstances, creative, economic, and in scheduling," declares Claremont, who also observes that "People may despise me for this, they may hate me, but they won't be uninterested."

(A review of X-Men 137 can be found elsewhere in this issue.)


THAT IS WHAT MAKES HUMANITY VIRTUALLY UNIQUE IN THE COSMOS, MY FRIEND-- THIS EXTRA-ORDINARY CAPACITY FOR SELF-SACRIFICE...
...THIS ABILITY TO TRIUMPH OVER SEEMINGLY INSURMOUNTABLE OBSTACLES IF THE CAUSE BE JUST, KNOWING ALL THE WHILE THAT TO DO SO MEANS CERTAIN DEATH.
THE X-MEN DO NOT REALIZE IT-- THEY MAY NEVER REALIZE, OR ACCEPT IT-- BUT THIS DAY THEY HAVE WON PERHAPS THE GREATEST VICTORY OF THEIR YOUNG LIVES.
JEAN GREY COULD HAVE LIVED TO BECOME A GOD. BUT IT WAS MORE IMPORTANT TO HER THAT SHE DIE... A HUMAN.

The End ?

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DESPITE THE FACT THAT IT HAS BEEN MANY YEARS SINCE THIS MYSTIC HAS BEHELD HIS WONDEROUS HOME, THE SIGHT OF IT RE-KINDLES PAINFUL MEMORIES.
FOR THEY ARE RECOLLECTIONS OF PRIDE, BATTLE, PASSION, TRAGEDY, AND...
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CF: The first thing I'd like to ask is who is Jim Starlin? Tell me something about yourself as a person.

Starlin: I like to read science-fiction. I like to read classics. I like Dickens. I'm going through "Sophie's Choice" right now. I like looking at painters and all kinds of illustrators such as DuLac, Lindsey, Gibson and others. I like the woods I live up in. I live up in the Catskill Mountains. I like wandering around there. I like my work.

CF: Do you fish or hunt?

Starlin: No, I just sort of wander around, sometimes camp out. I just sort of enjoy the place. It's beautiful to look at. Even now, during the winter, we get beautiful clouds that come in over the mountains that look like something Turner painted. It's just a gorgeous place.

CF: Do you do any landscape or scenery painting?

Starlin: No, almost all of my work is fantasy of some kind – fantasy or science-fiction.

CF: I know that's what you publish. I wasn't sure if you worked for your own enjoyment.

Starlin: Publishing keeps me so busy, I haven't any time. I enjoy what I'm doing so it's not a matter of not being able to do the kind of art that I like. I am doing it and getting paid for it, so I'm quite happy that way.

CF: So that scenery is just a nice

back-drop for relaxation.

Starlin: Right now I'm working out on my studio (my studio is an enclosed front porch) during the summer. I've got windows all around me which just show out onto the mountains. There's a little pond in front of our place. It's gorgeous. During the winter, I'm up in the guest bedroom with no window that I can look out of which is kind of depressing. Hopefully next year we'll actually get a real studio built. We're going to begin doing it this autumn and see if we can get it together before winter comes again.

CF: You grew up in Detroit, which is a much more urban environment than where you are now.

Starlin: Well, mine was more suburban. It was one of the factory towns for the auto companies, a little town called Berkley. Everyone in the town worked in auto factories in some way or another.

CF: This was the standard Levitown type of suburb, I presume.

Starlin: There were a lot of brick houses. It was an older suburb. The town right next door, Royal Oak, was the first city where Henry Ford built houses for the auto factory workers and I'm sure Berkley came out of that.

CF: So you have always lived in a basically non-urban environment.

Starlin: Well, I spent several years in New York. I lived right there in Manhattan for a long time. I've always felt comfortable being out in a less hectic and hurried environment.

CF: I've been noticing an interesting correlation between where an artist like the woods I live up in. I live up in example, Frank Miller lives in a much more urban environment and his stories tend to be rectangular blocks of giant buildings whereas you, who have lived in a less hectic environment, tend to have quite beautiful scenery and backgrounding in your work, especially in Metamorphosis/Oddessey.

Starlin: That's rather funny. During the Metamorphosis/Oddessey, when I was working on that, I was living in New York. Now that I'm working on Dreadstar, which is set mostly in giant metropolitan areas of outerspace, I'm in the woods. So if anything it's an inverted theory you've got there with me at least. But when I was doing Captain Marvel—in that book the scenes I enjoyed pencilling and inking the best were the garden scenes and it was just about the time that we had moved up here. So I can see a little bit of that idea showing up.

CF: I think there's got to be an effect of how you live overflowing into your work.

Starlin: Yes, I've seen it in different folks. Like Bernie Wrightson-he lived up here during the time he was doing Swamp Thing and Swamp Thing ended up going out into the woods a lot, into some of the most gorgeously drawn woods I'd ever seen.

CF: It makes for more realistic drawings because you're drawing what you're seeing.

Starlin: I know with Miller and his city environments, he actually went up on top of buildings to sketch water towers so he would have them right. I mean, he wanted the environment in his comic books to be like it really is.

CF: He seems to be very conscientious about what he is drawing.

Starlin: Fanatical is the word you're looking for. All the good ones are.

CF: In movies, who do you tend to enjoy and what do you go to see?

Starlin: Pretty good cross section in moves. I enjoy moves because they're

'THE ONLY THING THAT KEPT THE FATHER FROM EXILING HIS SON WAS A STRONG SENSE OF TRADITION AND FAMILY LINE.
'IN TURN, ONLY A PROMISE MADE A DYING MOTHER KEPT THE SON FROM ABANDONING NEBULARIA.

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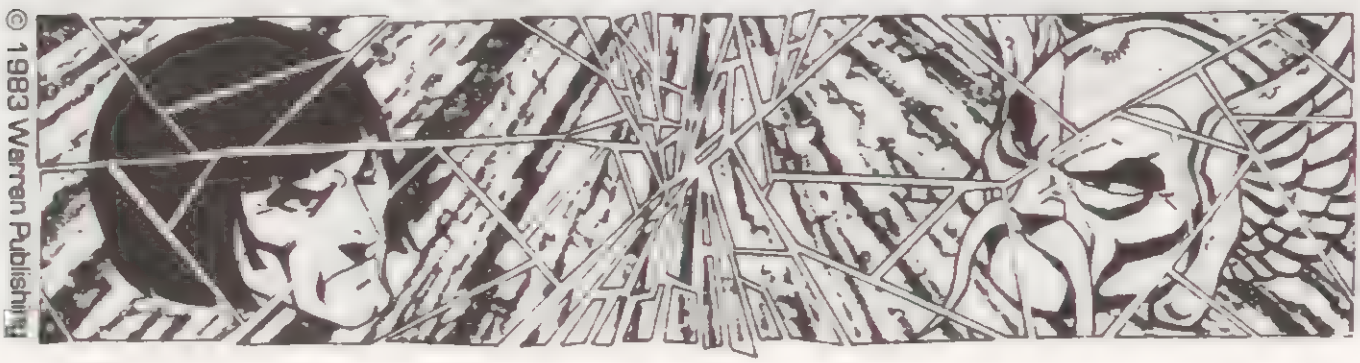

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the basis of comic book story-telling or vice versa, whoever you're talking to. Each has their own theory on it. This year I've gone to see everything from the "Texas Chain Saw Mesacre" to "Ghandi". As long as I hear the movie is good, I try to go see it. If I find out ahead of time it's not very well put together, I'll skip it.

CF: Do you rely on critics' or on friends' opinions?

Starlin: Both.

CF: Critics tend to be notoriously unreliable.

Starlin: Sometimes I enjoy going to see what they penned to check out the reasons. I recently read a review of "The Verdict" with Paul Newman. The thing that the reviewer was most upset with was exactly what made the movie work for me. I have to take every comment I get before seeing a movie with a little grain of salt.

CF: You began drawing comics for yourself when you were a very young man and then began to do work for a lot of ameteur publications. Where did you first start publishing?

Starlin: Allen Milgrom a friend of mine from way back in junior high. He turned me on to these fanzines. Allen was a very heavy fan. He knew all about these things. I liked reading comic books and I had some of them in the loft in my garage...

CF: Which ones?

Starlin: Mostly Superman and Batman at the time. This was back in the late fifties/early sixties when these were the only super-hero comic books that were being produced.

CF: That's before Marvel then.

Starlin: Oh, way before Marvel. The only heroes at that time were Wonder Woman, Superman, Batman, and John Jones and I think Adam Strange was popping in there somewhere along the way.

CF: Then the Flash came along.

Starlin: That was even later. I remember picking up those first issues of those things from the drug stores. So as I said, Allen turned me on to these fanzines and I did some work for the Texas Trio.

CF: That's when you did the American Eagle and Dr. Weird.

Starlin: Yes, and all those things I'd just as soon forget about at this point.

CF: Actually, even at that stage, there was quite a lot of nice work in them.

Starlin: Most of those things that you just mentioned were done much later also. They were done while I was in the service.

CF: Were you in the service as an illustrator?

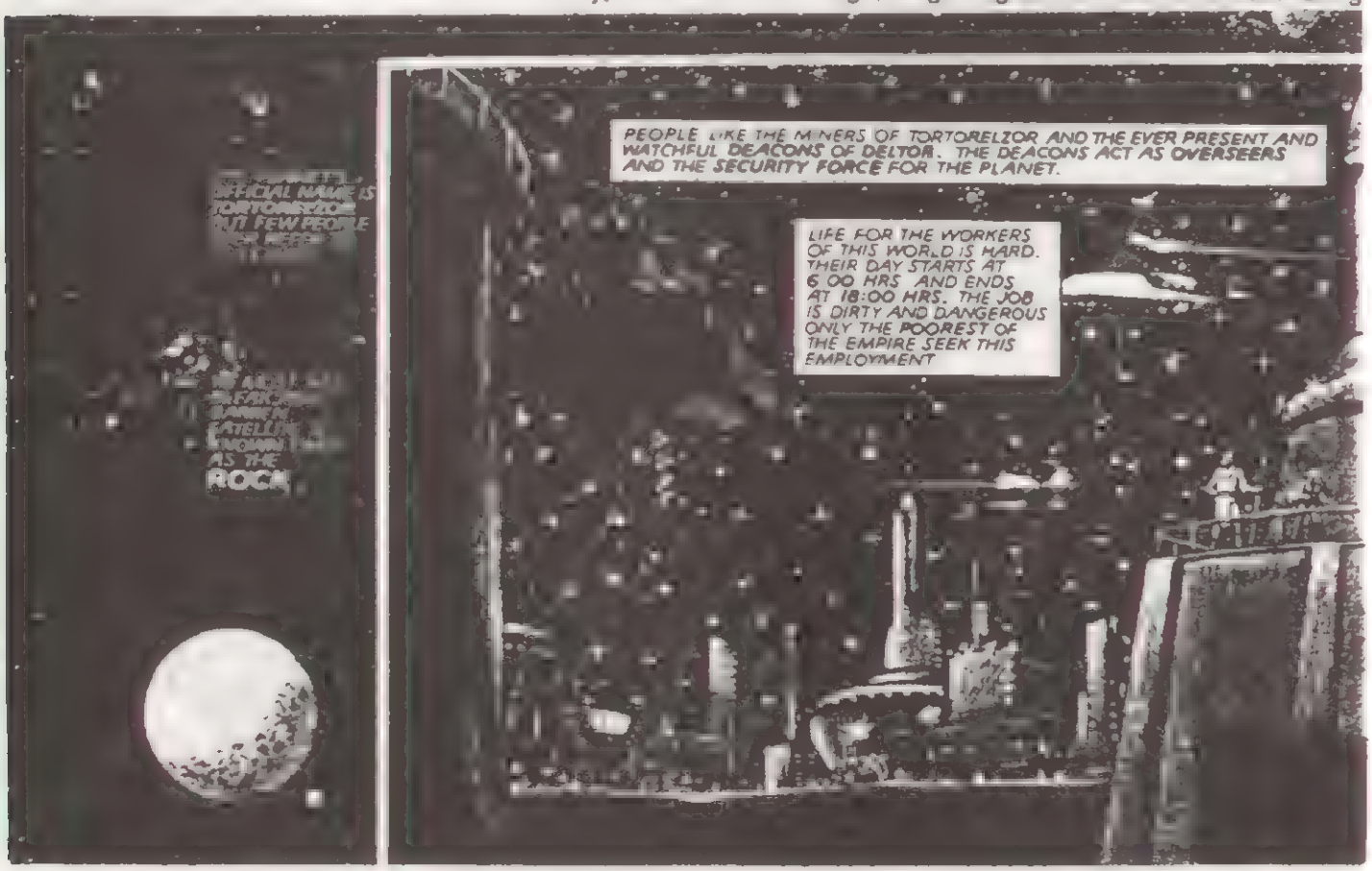
Starlin: I was in there as a photographer. I was in aerial photography, stationed in the Phillipines, and I was doing a lot of flying over Nam at the time.

CF: You were with the Air Force?

Starlin: Navy. It's very funny, I spent three and a half years in the Navy and I've never seen a ship other than from the air.

CF: You continued to do these amateur strips. Did the comic companies notice what you were doing at the time or did you bring it to their attention.

Starlin: I would occasionally send in a Hulk story I drew. I was a Hulk fanatic. Every year I would send in a Hulk story. They'd be rejected. I knew I was finally getting somewhere when they wrote back and said they had shown it to Herb Trimpe who was doing the Hulk story and he said it was getting better. So I continued doing


PEOPLE LIKE THE MINERS OF TORTORELZOR AND THE EVER PRESENT AND WATCHFUL DEACONS OF DELTOR. THE DEACONS ACT AS OVERSEERS AND THE SECURITY FORCE FOR THE PLANET.
LIFE FOR THE WORKERS OF THIS WORLD IS HARD. THEIR DAY STARTS AT 6:00 HRS AND ENDS AT 18:00 HRS. THE JOB IS DIRTY AND DANGEROUS ONLY THE POOREST OF THE EMPIRE SEEK THIS EMPLOYMENT

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as they come in conflict, they will be individually judged. I really think that that question is best answered by instance of Daredevil's conduct as they arise. It just occurred to me as I worked on the "Bullseye" story, for instance, that certain issues were at work here that could really define Daredevil.

HOWELL: You hadn't plotted those scenes in for that purpose?

MILLER: Well, I plotted them out completely, but I allowed myself enough room so that when an inspired moment came along, I have the room to turn a scene, to do thing with a character. That whole "***Kingpin***" sequence was affected by the "***Bullseye***" story and was changed by it, by the bonds I was setting up between Daredevil and Bullseye. I'm doing a scene, and something will occur to me, and I'll put it down, and it will affect the next one—so that allows for a certain degree of spontaneity. It's much more difficult when you do a plot, or a script and then the artist draws it, and that is that. You can't come up with too many inspired changes because it's out of your hands.

HOWELL: In terms of actually working on a story, do you work right from pencils?

MILLER: No, I do small lay-outs. I do the entire story this way, which takes about three days. And then I write and type the script, and then I pencil the pages, sometimes adjusting the script as I go.

HOWELL: We've heard you say that the comics medium is the perfect medium for telling stories. In the "***Upstart Interview,***" [***COMICS FEATURE #10***] you gave the opinion that super-hero stories were ***not*** in existence and comics created to accomodate them—it was the other way around: First there was the comics medium, and those working in it evolved the most effective way to make use of their medium.

MILLER: Yeah, I believe that super-heroes are a very natural product of comic books, and that's why they work so well in comics, the same way funny animals took over animation.

HOWELL: Do you think that might be in part why the non-super hero genres, like romance and detective comics, have by and large died out?

MILLER: That's one of the reasons. Another reason, I think is that the comic books currently being produced are by people who grew up reading super-hero comic books—there's a generation of us. In some cases, that's all they know. Another reason is the audience seems to have gotten smaller. There seems to be little attempt to approach anyone outside the current audience. Marvel seems to be gearing more and more projects to its fan audience.

KALISH: The fan shops.

MILLER: Exactly. The books that seem to be designed for low print, guaranteed sale.

It shows how insulated this business is from the entertainment world, that the kung-fu craze hit, but Marvel didn't come out with a kung-fu comic until after the craze had petered out. And DC didn't come out with a kung-fu comic until several years after that.

HOWELL: And you can even question the whole basis of exploiting a trend, anyway.

MILLER: Well, supposedly, we're in this to sell copies. To do this, we give the audience what they want. Or we teach them to want what we give. Also, I often find myself doing a story that involves a trend, because I'm getting into that trend. I'm a part of the TV audience, the movie audience, and I'm affected by what I see.

HOWELL: Have you ever found yourself, under instruction, or otherwise, doing a story about a trend you don't feel, that you're not into, just because you know it's popular?

MILLER: You mean disco stories? (Laughs) Since I've been on ***DAREDEVIL***, I've had a lot of control. The stories in the books are stories I really enjoy working on. The only trend story I can think of that I've done is the Ninja thing, and that was something I chose to do. When I hear about stories that are done about fads I don't like, I just avoid those assignments.

HOWELL: I was also thinking of fads that are somewhat more subtle than that. There's been almost an affirmative action drive over the last four years to get more female protagonists acting agressively. However, no one wants to put characters in books to balance off what has been perceived as forty years of wimp-outs.

MILLER: Yeah, that's a good point. I believe in that trend very much. It's not only just women; ***DAREDEVIL***'s ready made to feature any group who has not been treated well or has been ignored or stereotyped. I think the idea of a wheelchair-bound secretary was brilliant.

HOWELL: Was she Roger McKenzie's idea?

MILLER: Yes. The best thing about her is that her impairment is

"That whole 'Kingpin' sequence was affected by the 'Bullseye' story and was changed by it, by the bonds I was setting up between Daredevil and Bullseye."

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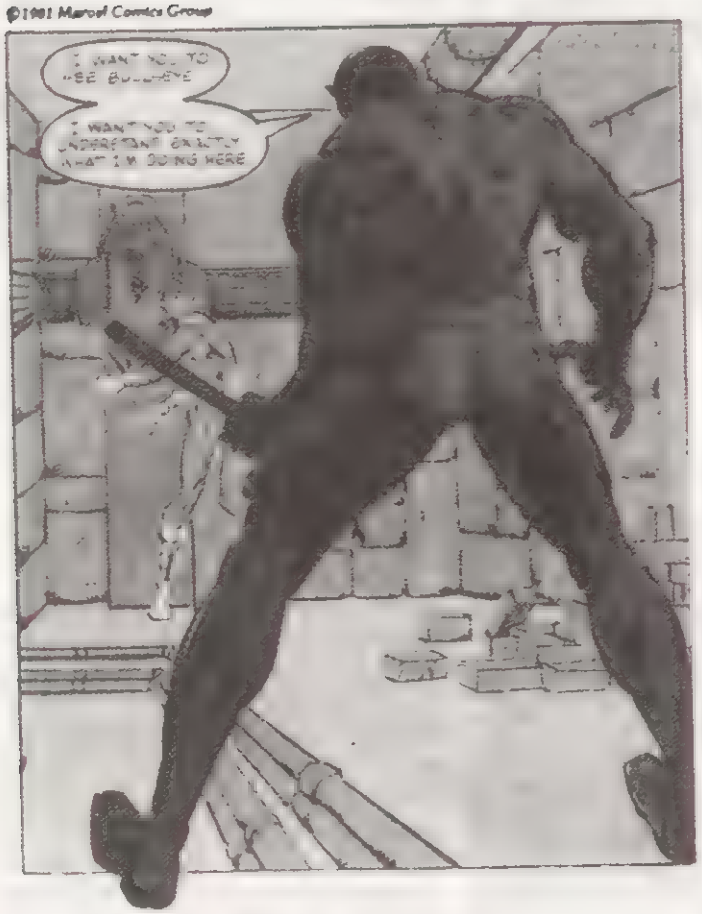
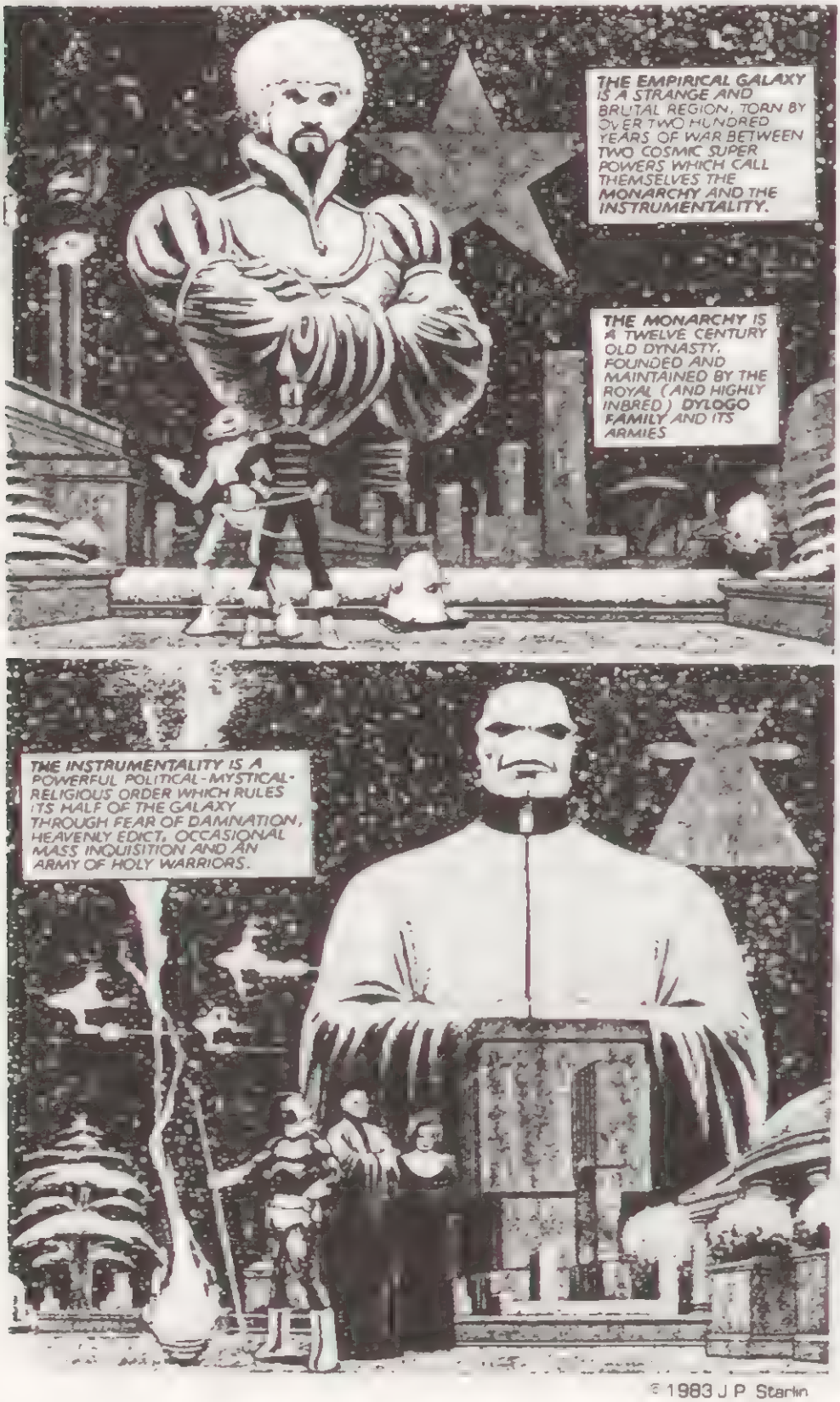


terests over there. It still seems to me to this day that if there hadn't been any interference from the the Americans and the French that it probably would have ended up the same way, but it probably would have been a lot less bloody.

CF: Wasn't that only because we pulled out?

Starlin: We had laid a couple decades of bloody war at their feet. They were obviously going to take over anyhow. We sat there for close to two decades, keeping this war going. The North Vietnamese were not heroes either. They were just as corrupt as the government we were supporting was. It was siding two bad sides against each other. We were backing one and the Chinese and the Russians were backing the other. It was a mess. To me, they should have been just left on their own, let them settle it out and we could have dealt with whoever enended up being a winner then on a political level.


THE EMPIRICAL GALAXY IS A STRANGE AND BRUTAL REGION, TORN BY OVER TWO HUNDRED YEARS OF WAR BETWEEN TWO COSMIC SUPER POWERS WHICH CALL THEMSELVES THE MONARCHY AND THE INSTRUMENTALITY.
THE MONARCHY IS A TWELVE CENTURY OLD DYNASTY, FOUNDED AND MAINTAINED BY THE ROYAL (AND HIGHLY INBRED) DYLOGO FAMILY AND ITS ARMIES
THE INSTRUMENTALITY IS A POWERFUL POLITICAL-MYSTICAL-RELIGIOUS ORDER WHICH RULES ITS HALF OF THE GALAXY THROUGH FEAR OF DAMNATION, HEAVENLY EDICT, OCCASIONAL MASS INQUISITION AND AN ARMY OF HOLY WARRIORS.

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CF: It's unfortunate, but no one ever seems content to leave anything alone — all through history.

Starlin: Well, this is hindsight talking on my part.

CF: Even if we'd left them, it's unlikely that everyone else would have left them alone.

Starlin: We've always had a tendancy in this country to think that we can not deal with communist countries. For a long time we thought that. If they were a communist country they were the enemy. Only recently we've found that we can deal with the Red Chinese. If we had let Vietnam become North Vietnam, you know, Communist Vietnam, we could have dealt with them on a political level. The situation probably wouldn't have been as bad. The regime that ended up in power probably wouldn't have been as terrible and blood thirsty if they hadn't had two decades of we pounded into their environment. Chances are, one side or the other would have won within a year or two and their economy and their life style would have stablized by this point.

CF: That's assuming that if we had stayed out, everyone else would have stayed out. For instance, we stayed out of Africa, but that hasn't kept others out or other nations from putting armies there.

Starlin: We haven't really stayed out of Africa all that much. We're doing a lot of it through the British. The British have always kept their presence. If you're going to break it down to "Them folks" and us, you'd have to consider anything that's being done by the Western powers the same as everything being done by the Eastern powers. You sort of have to break it up into either side. The Western powers have had their influence in Africa, so have the Eastern block. None of the third world coun-

tries have really gotten off without our interference.

CF: Returning to when you first started working for **Starstudded** and other publications, which artists in the comic industry were you looking at as far as influence and style?

Starlin: At that point Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko were the idols I worshipped. Just about anybody whose work was carried, I was looking at. I read everything. I was impressed by Infantino and Kane. Buscema came along at that time. I've always kept track of what's going on in the business as best I could no matter what my situation has been. Everything that appears influences me in one way or another.

CF: When you first started doing the strips, the Jack Kirby influence showed itself very strongly.

Starlin: Yes, I was in a flood of people who were coming in who were raised on Jack Kirby. We had to boost ourselves out of it slowly but surely. There were dozens of others. Steranko came in that way, Smith, myself — I could go on. There must be at least a half dozen more.

CF: I think that Jack Kirby had almost a revolutionary impact on the way comics were done.

Starlin: They had so much more excitement than anything else being done at that time.

CF: Were you actually writing these strips right from the beginning?

Starlin: Well, no. They wouldn't let me write them at first. I was actually plotting them from the beginning. Half the time I was plotting them. The horror stories and the love stories were all from somebody else's plot. As soon as I got into doing the super-heroes, I'd either actually plot them, as I did with the first Iron Man, or I'd work with Steve Gerber as I did with the second Iron Man. We talked the plot all out. I had my finger in the pie at that point. It wasn't until my third issue of Captain Marvel that Roy — I told him I wanted to write — he said, "Okay, what we can do is, we have three chapters in this book. You write one of the chapters and if I like it, if it's as good as our standards, you can write your own book." And I did it and he liked it. He said, "You can start writing your own stuff."

CF: From the beginning on Iron Man, a number of concepts and characters emerged that pretty much stayed with your work throughout.

Starlin: I had a number of characters I had created before I ever got into the business. Most of them were based from concepts, Freudian concepts I had learned in a psych class in college. There were Thanos, Eros, Mentor and the Destroyer. We needed a plot concept; I liked my characters so I sort of integrated them into the artwork and into the storyline as best I could. Rather than falling back on Marvel's old characters, I was introducing new ones.

CF: Those characters seem to still be kicking around the Marvel Universe, with one becoming an Avenger and one becoming a Defender, in fact.

Starlin: The one who is becoming a Defender wasn't actually my character. I revamped her — Moon Dragon. She was actually created by Mike Friedrich and George Tuska. She had a different name. She was called Madame McEvil at that point. I don't remember if I came up with the new name or if Roy — somebody came up with Moon Dragon and she became part of the Titan series from there. She was sort of cannibalized and put back together to become a Titan.

CF: I don't remember Madame McEvil...

Starlin: In one issue of Iron Man she appeared as Madame McEvil.

CF: Starfox is becoming an Avenger.

Starlin: And his name is going to be changing once more. It turns out Starfox — there's trouble with that name. A movie company just contacted Marvel and told them that Starfox was the name of a movie they were making and that they would have to change it or legal action would be taken. So it looks like Eros/Starfox is going to be getting another name soon.

CF: What you became well known for — because of Warlock and Captain Marvel — was killing off super-heroes. Recently that has become something of an issue. The whole concept of the "Big Bang" and the Little Bang" and Jim Shooter's planned wipe-out of the Marvel Universe.

Starlin: I'd rather think that what I was doing with them was exploring death — life and death. These characters deal with a game that is so far from what you and I know as reality. They're dealing with life and death as an everyday occurance. What I wanted to do with the Captain Marvel and the Warlock series was to explore the losing side of this whole super-hero business. Most of the time, the way sales are, if a book is successful, a character has to be continued on. He can't die. He can't lose. I was lucky enough to have Captain Marvel and Warlock to play with and to finish. Neither were big financial successes. Warlock's book had died off so I was given the opportunity to kill off Warlock. Captain Marvel had taken a nose-dive in sales and the book had been discontinued. They wanted to revamp the character in new form. I was allowed to do that again.

CF: Is this when they wanted to create the female version of Captain Marvel?

Starlin: At that time there wasn't any idea of what the version would be.

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It was just going to be a new Captain Marvel because the old one had become too convoluted over the years to make sense out of it. Or to make sense out of in a sentence or less, which is the rule of thumb to follow for a good super hero to be done.

CF: This gave you the opportunity to do what you wanted with the existing character.

Starlin: Right. In neither case did I do it just for gratuitous thrills or for the fact that death sells. At that point there were no sales figures showing that death sells as there are now. I have no objection to characters being killed off which seemed to be the "scream and holler" in fandom about six months ago with Shooter supposedly going to kill off half the people in the universe. I'll get back to that too — there's a story on that. If it's done just to kill the characters off to pick up sales, no I don't like that. I think that sort of diminishes the art form. But if there is a story to be told or something to be examined and the only way it can be done is to have somebody die, well people do that in life; people die. The basis of Marvel Comics was to make realistic superheroes — as realistic as they can be. Part of that means that they must eventually come to an end.

CF: The company had lacked the courage to take a character who is financial success, who is making money, and allow anything very radical or drastic to happen to that character.

Starlin: That wouldn't make any sense. In a business area, it wouldn't make sense. We have to face it, we are in a business. I understand why Spiderman hasn't changed for years. It sells the way it is.

CF: Is that why the edict came down that there should be no change, just the appearance of change?

Starlin: I don't know about that, but that makes perfect sense. It's successful.

CF: Isn't that, in the long run, stifling?

Starlin: It's stifling, but everything comes to that point. Superman came to that point in the '50s. The same thing happened with Batman. It's part of the evolution. If you can not get out of an idea, you go with it 'till it becomes dead and then you do revisions on it.

CF: You did the Superman character for a while. What did you think of the character? How did you approach the character? What did you think of all the obsolete baggage that does hang around that character?

Starlin: Superman is a double-edged sword. Superman is the ultimate hero. He's the basis for all the superheroes. He's the father. It was a heavy charge for me to do him. It gave me a chance to take him as far as I thought the concept could really go. Unfortunately there is baggage connected with Superman. Superman is another success. There were certain stories I ran into opposition about doing, just because they were not stories that Superman should do. There were certain ideas I had to sneak in because of Superman's past history. It was a kick doing it. Superman is supposedly the ultimate thing to do in this business.

CF: How do you view the character? Do you view him as this incredibly powerful alien walking among men or do you view him as this small town boy

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BUT I'M THROUGH WITH FAILURE... NEVER AGAIN
OEDI, YOU BETTER CLEAR OUT WHAT I'M ABOUT TO TRY MAY CAUSE ANOTHER CAVE-IN
NO WAY, VANTH! YOU AND I CAME TO THIS DANCE TOGETHER
WE'LL LEAVE TOGETHER
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from Smallville?

Starlin: I view him as this incredible force, somewhat a naive force. I tried plotting out the stories. They didn't want me to write my own Superman stories. I guess I can't blame them. I pictured him as this, not dumb, but sort of naive force, who has this incredible power, but a lot of times, for all his intelligence, doesn't think out what's happening and gets himself into some rather dumb situations because of it. Superman, I always felt, was not the thinking man's hero. He's the child avenger.

CF: He has so much power that he's never learned how to use it.

Starlin: They have had stories along the way where they have had him grow, but then the next month he immediately goes back to doing what he did all along.

CF: When you can move a planet with your pinky you don't go in for physical or mental training that often. I guess Batman, who has less power, has to do that a great deal more.

Starlin: Right. The complete antithesis of Superman. That's why they make a great team.

CF: The villain you did in the **DC Presents** issues seemed to physically resemble Thanos a great deal. Was that deliberate?

Starlin: Well, not deliberate so much as I needed a physical threat that appeared more powerful than Superman. The fact that he was large and bulky tended to make him look a lot like Thanos or Darkseid. What I tried to do with him was give him shorter, stubbier legs, just to sort of change the image a little bit. I find the idea of a huge hulking menace very appealing. I sort of repeated that image in the Dreadstar series. I figure great evil should have a great evil appearance.

CF: It's interesting that you mention Darkseid. The work that you have done with Thanos seems to resemble the Forth World that Jack Kirby built over at DC.

Starlin: It didn't start out to be that way. Kirby was a great influence on me. Originally Thanos was a very skinny, dark-looking character. If he looked like anybody, he looked more like Metron from the Fourth World series. I'm not exactly sure what prompted us to make him more monsterous looking. I know that Roy wanted to show DC that we could do their Kirby character better than DC could. He was the editor at that time. It may have ended up being somewhat like the Fourth World but I tried to get it away from that as we went along.

CF: I don't think I'd want to be a fairly new artist trying to do Kirby better than Kirby.

Starlin: Well, I didn't like the idea.

CF: After you were doing Captain Marvel, Warlock and Master Kung Fu for a while, you broke from Marvel...

Starlin: I had diseggreements with Marvel several times along the line. I've probably quit Marvel about six different times. I'm not what you'd call a company man. I've worked for just about everybody at one time or another: DC, Warren, Marvel, Eclipse. I'm doing a little bit of work for Pacific right now. About the only folks I haven't worked for yet is First Comics.

CF: Someone should remind them.

Starlin: I don't know where I'd get time time for anything for them right now anyhow.

CF: What lead to the conflict with Marvel?

Starlin: It was a lot of business things. Some were misunderstandings.

CF: Was it more misunderstandings or disagreements over control of how you were drawing the comics?

Starlin: My disagreements over editorial control — some of them were bargains that I felt hadn't been lived up to on Marvel's side. There was quite a bit of confusion during that time. We'd have a new editor every two months it seemed. Some editors were better than others. Because of all the confusion, a lot of bad spirits and bad times came out, which has all been run through by other people in other interviews. I'm not even going to get into that at this point.

CF: At that time didn't you have a certain amount of friction with Jim Shooter?

Starlin: Yeah, as a matter of fact Jim and I started off as blood enemies it seemed like. He was working for Gerry Conway as an assistant editor.

There was a mix-up on some artwork being changed. At this point I realize that Jim sort of got himself caught in the middle of it having to defend his assistant-assistant-editors. We started off on bad terms. For the first time, I think immediately after talking to him I quite Marvel again. Since that

time Jim and I have worked together. We worked together on the graphic novel contracts and the Epic comic line contracts. Jim and I get along quite well at this point. I have a tremendous amount of respect for the man. He's done a lot of good things for the business in his capacity as Editor-In-Chief of Marvel.

CF: What specifically do you think he's accomplished?

Starlin: He's gotten the rates up — someone told me the other day that rates have gone up over 200% over the last ten years. He was able to start the graphic novel concept with the royalties added to it.

CF: How did that come about? How was a company convienced to change from a policy that for years had just paid piece work?

Starlin: With the work-for-hire concept that was being promoted in — I believe it was a 1979 copyright law change, work-for-hire became their bread and butter. There was a guild at the time which tried unsuccessfully to fight the advent of work-for-hire in the comics. A lot of people left the industry at this time because of this concept that the companies own everything. Jim knows the business. He realized that a lot of the talent that was the best was gone, or going or would soon disappear from the scene because of this. There were new publications coming out. Eclipse was out at the time and siphoning off some talent. Even at this point, Eclipse didn't have much of a royalty basis or anything like that themselves. There was a 2% royalty you got off the book after a certain amount of copies were sold. What Eclipse did have going for it, and before that Star Reach had, was the fact that they would grant you your copyrights. Jim wanted to produce a better kind of package, something similar to the European albums, the graphic novels. He realized that for that kind of package you need the best people working on it. We talked about it. We used to play volleyball out at Central Park quite a bit. When I was working for Mavel there was a Marvel team playing volleyball and I'd go out and play volleyball with them. We started talking about this at that point. It finally lead to the point where he said, "Why don't you start working with me on this contract to see if we can get this thing done? He directed. I did a lot of the work on the actual contract.

CF: Did you have to go back and study law at that point?

Starlin: Well, I had to find out everything I could on copyright law and contract law. I went to a lawyer on it a few times at the beginning. I realized that as far as publishing went I knew so much more than the lawyer did. So, with some suggestions from him and some other books that I picked up along the way, I learned as much as Al could so I could write up a contract, or work with Marvel writing up a contract that would be acceptable for this kind of deal. It was kind of a hectic year and a half. I'm surprised I didn't end up with an ulcer out of it. Cadence would send me a contract, I would look it over, change things, send it back. They would approve the changes but make additional changes of their own which screwed up the contract again. We went back and forth like this for about ten different times before we got it right.

CF: What seemed to be the worst sticking points with Cadence?

Starlin: A lot of it was the lawyer who was working there at the time She thought her job was to get as much for Marvel as she could. She would write things in one paragraph that would agree with what we wanted and then another paragraph would take it back. They were very convoluted pieces of legal paperwork at that point.

CF: What did they seem least agreeable to relinquish? The ownership?

Starlin: There were several contracts that had things in there – they were hidden in language – that said they never had to pay us a cent. I'd take it to Shooter and he'd say, "Is that what it really says?" He'd look at it and he'd say, "That's what it

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says." He'd send it back to them and say, "Change this." Jim was having a terrible time with it because all the executives are over in New Jersey and he's in New York. He wasn't an officer of the company at that time and so he was part of the working classes himself. They would either listen to him or not listen to him. Fortunately, we got Mike Hobson in there at the end, who was a Vice President and who they listened to as an equal. Mike is terrific at dealing with people. He was able to get us over the final hump, thank God.

CF: He spoke their language.

Starlin: Exactly.

CF: The first Marvel graphic novel utilized an existing Marvel property.

Starlin: That wasn't the plan originally. Originally Dreadstar was supposed to be the first one. Somewhere along the lines they decided they wanted a Marvel character to lead it off. Orignally Captain Marvel was supposed to be the third graphic novel. We had Elric and Dreadstar both in house before Captain Marvel was even started. For a while it looked like Captain Marvel was never going to get there because, no sooner than I started pencilling it I dislocated my finger. A good deal of the pencils on that job were done with a splint on my finger. Even after I got the splint off I found I couldn't ink properly so the entire job was inked with felt tips rather than with pen. It was somewhat of a jinxed project. It's fortunate that it came off and worked out as well as it did.

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CF: It sold very well I understand.

Starlin: Three printings.

CF: Hasn't DC looked at Marvel and realized that they are going to be somewhat affected?

Starlin: DC has always been sort of slow about getting into new concepts. They never hit on to the **Heavy Metal/Epic Illustrated** kind of series. There's talk over there now of doing graphic novels and from what I understand Miller has worked out some kind of deal with continuous characters being copyrighted, owned by the author. From what I gather it's not nearly as good a deal as the Marvel one, but they're slowly getting pulled into it.

CF: Are you aware of what the differences are between the DC and the Marvel deals?

Starlin: From what I understand — I may be wrong on this, but I don't think I am — the author can hold his copyright, the copyright notice is always in his name, but DC Comics has the rights to use it forever. I mena, the thing is in the author's name but DC has control of it completely.

CF: Does DC have to pay the author if they use it?

Starlin: I believe so. I don't know the specifics. On the Marvel deal there's a termination date. If Marvel doesn't do anything with the characters or the books or the merchandising during a certain amount of time, I can give them notice and within six months all the rights revert back to me and become mine again.

CF: What happens to the Marvel contract if they decide to use a different creator?

Starlin: Oh they can't. It's all written in the contract; it's got to be me.

CF: The graphic novels were evolutionary toward the Epic comics, were they not?

Starlin: Yeah, we showed that we could sell new character. The graphic novel Dreadstar, sold respectably. At that point we decided to go on and talk about doing a regular series under this basis which the Epic line of comics eventually became. It only took us about three months to work out a contract on that one.

CF: I guess that was based on your graphic novel contract.

Starlin: Basically. We had to change books to magazines and then put in printing dates. There were a few little changes, but it wasn't much really.

CF: Another thing that has changed relationships is that DC started paying a royalty on copies over one hundred thousand. I guess that was fairly easy for them to afford to do. Then Marvel followed suit and certainly it's costing Marvel more, but I guess now it's an industry standard.

Starlin: As a matter of fact, Shooter had wanted to push that concept through earlier, but couldn't because of the Gerber suit that was going on. They didn't want to pay any kind of royalties on the books because it would look, at the time, like they were caving in to Gerber's suit. Fortunately, National did it first. In that case Marvel could say, "We're not caving into Gerber's suit. We were following National's example." The fact that National did it first on their regular comic books, Marvel was able to follow suit after that.

CF: Quite a lot has been changing in the industry. I guess a lot of the talent that had been leaving the comics will be returning.

Starlin: Well, we have Barry Smith doing work again, Bernie Wrightson's going to be doing an irregular back-up feature in Dreadstar with me.

CF: What will that be?

Starlin: It's called "Interstellar Toybox". All I can tell you about it at this point is that it begins in issue number six in **Dreadstar** and the hero of it is named Aldo Gortney and he's a genius in a bucket. We have other folks. We have Pacific Comics now coming up and Neal Adams is doing some work for them again.

CF: You mentioned before that you were doing some work for Pacific?

Starlin: I'm doing the covers for some reprints that they're doing of the Darklon series from over at Warren. I agreed to do the cover. The whole book is going to have my stuff in it so I might as well do the cover.

CF: They have a Wrightson volume and a couple of others I believe also. When they republish the material from Warren like that, do you receive any royalty from that?

Starlin: No, the Warren stuff was work-for-hire. I don't believe there's any royalty involvement in this one at all. They're just printing it up.

CF: You mentioned before that there was a story involved in the whole death of the marvel universe, big bang/little bang rumor that hit. Can we touch on that?

Starlin: Oh yes. The "Jim Shooter is going to waste the entire Marvel Universe" thing.

CF: Exactly.

Starlin: That was a story that I happened to be there in the beginning of, when the whole mess started. It was a case of Jim Shooter, myself, Tom DeFalco, and Mark Gruenwald. We went out for a drink after work and as comic writers and artists tend to do, after we had a few drinks in us we began speculating on what could be done with what. There was talk of Captain America being replaced and Tony Stark and Iron Man. It was all just speculation. There was no fact to it. As a matter of fact, the people who picked up the rumor didn't even get the entire story. At one point it was suggested that the entire Marvel Universe be destroyed and the next month all the books start off again with new origins at issue number one. Jim at one point said that, seeing that I'm the master of death according to the fanzines, that I should do the last five pages of every issue of the books with the same conclusion: the entire universe being blown up and everything starting over from new. It was all just talk. I don't know who got the story to who, but nothing was ever going to be done with it, but it was reported as a fact.

CF: How did it get to Doug Moench who was the person who brought it to the press?

Starlin: I have no idea. Obviously somebody at the table mentioned it to somebody else who mentioned it to somebody else who mentioned it to Doug Moench who took it as fact, if Doug is the source of this. I don't know about that at this point.

CF: He's quoted as being the source.

Starlin: Oh, is he? Well Doug had just quit Marvel at that point and had a lot of sour grapes going through his system so maybe he was the source. I don't know.

CF: Another thing that Doug laid at the feet of Jim Shooter is what became of Gene Day, practically to the point of accusing Jim of his death.

Starlin: Well I did read that article in the **Comics Scene** that Doug wrote and the follow-up article in the back. Blaming Jim for Gene Day's death is ridiculous. I met Gene up at Marvel about the time I was doing the **Death of Captain Marvel** book. I was sitting there coloring some covers that were never used on the book. He was in from Canada and was working on a **Master of Kung Fu** story at the time in there, in the same office space that I was using. We were together for about six hours. During that time I'm sure he smoked at least half a pack of cigarettes, downed about four or five cups of coffee. Gene killed himself. Gene was obviously doing terrible things to his body. He would have probably died if he'd been working or not working, if he'd had trouble with Shooter or didn't. The man was a walking coronary waiting to happen. It's ridiculous to lay the blame on Jim. If it hadn't been for the timing, Gene probably would have walked up some stairs and had a coronary anyhow, whether he had any anxiety or not.

CF: According to Doug, Gene had been yanked off **Master of Kung Fu** by Shooter and thrown out of Marvel and was going over to DC.

Starlin: That's not true. Gene and Doug were told that there had to be some major changes in the book. The Kung Fu book wasn't selling. It was a terrible selling book. It was Shooter's job as Editor-In-Chief to see if he could jazz up sales on it. Doug and Gene decided that they didn't want to make

IT WAS THAT WAY BACK ON MY HOMEWORLD, BYEREXIA, IN THE MILKY WAY GALAXY.
PERHAPS ALL PLANETS IN THE UNIVERSE ARE SO CURSED I DON'T KNOW
I REMEMBER THE COLD BACK ON BYEREXIA
AND I REMEMBER THE SOUND OF THE SNOW BEARS.
THE SOUND OF THE HUNGRY SNOW BEARS..
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the changes in the characters that had to be done. They quit the book. Gene was doing work on **Star Wars**. He was going to be taking over—actually did in fact do some of the Indiana Jones stuff. He had never been fired. He always had work to do. I know that Jim had some arguments with him on Gene's layout style, but it wasn't anything like Gene was going to find himself in the bread line. Doug on the other hand, just decided that he was going to quit Marvel completely and called up National and got work over there before he quit Marvel. He decided that this was the time for him to leave. He decided that this was the time to trash Shooter. There seems to be a lot of that going around.

CF: Yes, a lot of people have tried to trash Shooter lately: Roy Thomas and Rick Marshal and quite a variety of people.

Starlin: I don't know much about Rick and Roy's problem with it. Mostly what I've seen is everyone taking shots at Jim inside the fanzines like the **Comic Journal** last year with their horrible drawing of Shooter in the Napoleonic pose. It was really a horrible caricature. They blamed him for just about everything in the world imaginable. All the wrongs in the comic book industry have been laid at his feet at this point. In truth the man has been good for the industry. He's done a lot of good things. He's an easy target though. He's six foot and he looks menacing. It's so easy to take shots at him because he doesn't fight back. He doesn't figure it's necessary.

CF: I guess he feels his work speaks for itself.

Starlin: In most cases it does. If you sat there and examined the record...

CF: But most people just read the articles rather than examining his record.

Starlin: That brings up a point which I've been wanting to talk about. The fanzines now—I'm not sure they realize just how much they reach out and do affect this business. They represent themselves as journalists. In most cases most of the fanzines I've seen have attempted certain journalistic standards in their work. There have been some notable exceptions over the last year-and-a-half or two years that I find very disturbing. There have been a number of instances that I'm aware of or that I have been involved in myself in which the integrity of certain fanzine publishing companies has been less than honorable. Just to run off a few examples. When we were doing the Epic Comic Line contract, we still had about a month's work to do on the contract, nothing had been settled, nothing had been signed, and a certain fanzine reporter wrote out a story saying that the contracts had been completed. She listed off what my rates supposedly were. Then she said it was about time that Marvel got forced into doing this, this was the way that it was supposed to be all along. At this time nothing was signed. I immediately got a lot of flack saying, "Hey what's this story?What's this all about?" This story nearly screwed up the entire deal. When i questioned the reporter, I called her up, she wouldn't tell me, which I can understand—protecting sources—who the story came from. At the same time, when I asked her why she didn't confirm the thing, she said she didn't have my phone number to confirm it. I asked her why she didn't call Marvel. She gave me some "hem-and haw" that they might have denied it or something. She never even bothered to check.

CF: Couldn't Marvel have put her in touch with you?

Starlin: They could have. All she would have had to do was ask for me. They wouldn't have given her the number, but she could have had them call me and I could have confirmed or denied the story. Even Bernstein and Woodward during the Watergate crisis—when they got a story, they called up the White House to give them a chance to confirm or deny. That's all I'd like to have happen myself. I would like to have the same

privilege as the Watergate conspiritors had. It's not only this incident, but there have been a number of other things that have come up that I find very disturbing about the ethics of the fanzine business in certain cases. There's one fanzine out there that also happens to be in the direct sales comic book publishing business. From what I've been able to see, I've never yet seen a positive review about a direct sales comic book or magazine or novel from a competitor from this fanzine. At the same time, anything that they've printed gets glowing reviews and in some cases is reviewed in two different issues. There have also been instances of other artists and writers that I've talked to that have cost a very ominous shadow on the ethics of the publishers. Frank Miller tells me that in an interview he did for a certain fanzine, he said several nice things about Jim Shooter and his working relationship with Shooter. When the interview came out, he found that everything he said about Shooter, had been edited from the script because the fanzine itself had it in for Shooter. There was another incident when Bill Sienkiewicz was asked for an interview and some drawings for their fanzine. He declined the interview because he said, "Well you guys have trashed me in several reviews before." The editor at this point said, "If we give you a couple of good reviews, will you do the interview with us?" That doesn't strike me as very ethical. There was a time reported in an editorial that this particular editor had wandered into a convention in San Diego and was horrified to find that Mike Grell and myself were giving drawing lessons to kids who wanted to become comic book artist. The panel that he walked into in reality was a panel discussion about fine arts in comics. This editor forgot to mention that Leonard Star and Will Eisner were also on the panel with us. Just two minor discreptinces in the story but you can see what a difference it makes. There have been some occassions in the last year or so that have made me question the honesty and integrity of certain fanzines. People in this business do read these publications. If they don't read they hear about them. What they print is a fact of the business and they can affect decisions from what they put down or affect working relationships. It takes a while for the truth of these things to circulate around if it's an erroneous article. The lie lasts longer than it should. It takes a while sometimes for the truth to come back out.

CF: Can what a publication comes out with affect the career or income of a creator?

Starlin: Well, in my case where it reported the contract being completed, and that I had forced Marvel into doing this, (in which case if Shooter and Hobson were not the level headed people they were) they could have said, "What do you mean we've been forced into it? Go hit the road." In which case my income would have gone right out the window. Yes, they can affect it.

CF: That's dangerous. That's power without control.

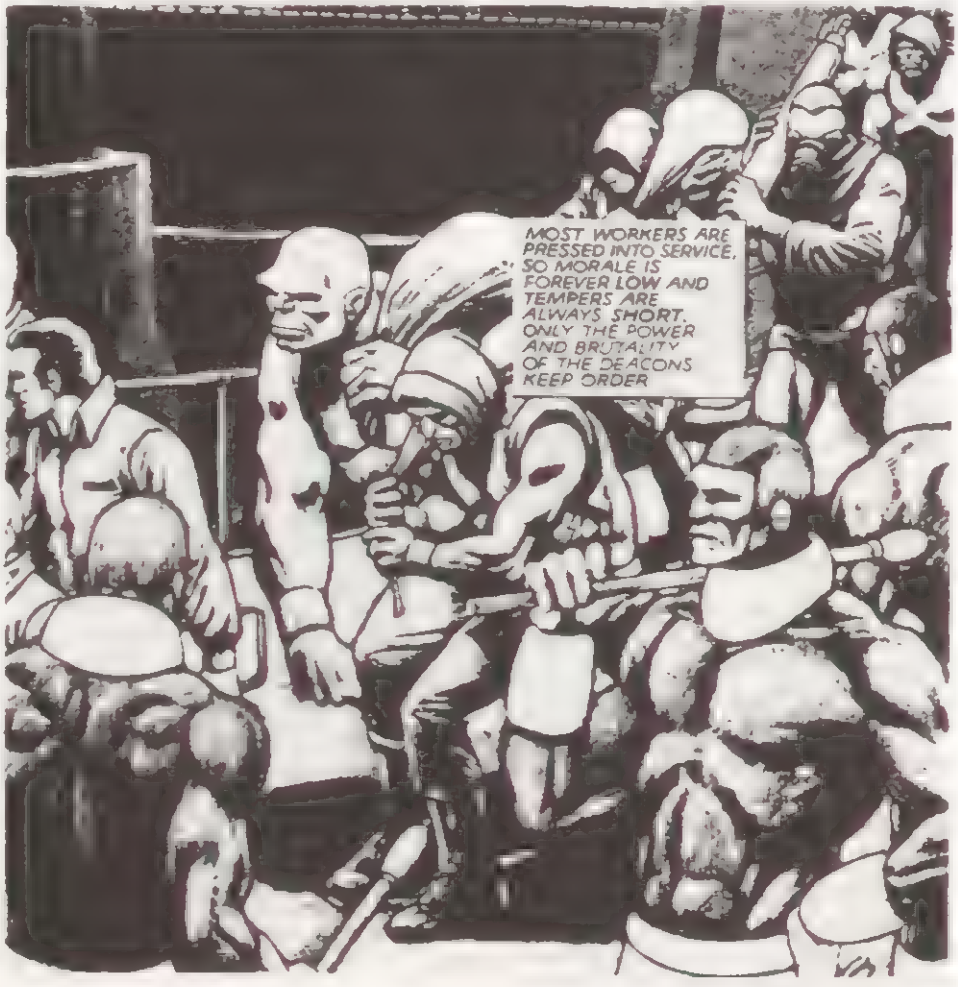
Starlin: The word is a powerful weapon, expecially if it's in the hands of irresponsible people.

CF: What would you suggest that publications do?

Starlin: Call up and confirm their stories. Not take one source as the Bible. See if they can confirm a story from at least two or three sources.

CF: We have a policy of doing that, such as when the whole concept of the death of the Marvel Universe came out. We talked to all the editors and all the writers. However, when the story finally came out, we found that we had been scooped by everyone else. That's not good for sales. It's very difficult to be in that situation, and I don't think the professionals seem to react that negatively. I mean they don't place a stigma on you if you use bad journalism or try to help you out if you use good journalism

Starlin: I don't think that's exactly true. I know one fanzine in particular that through the general working population of comics is looked down upon as being a sensational rumor-


MOST WORKERS ARE PRESSED INTO SERVICE, SO MORALE IS FOREVER LOW AND TEMPERS ARE ALWAYS SHORT. ONLY THE POWER AND BRUTALITY OF THE DEACONS KEEP ORDER

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monger. Most responsible working professionals have been avoiding this publication. At least this is the case with the folks I've talked to over at Marvel. I'm in contact with most of them.

CF: So you think this will begin to have an affect? In the past it hasn't.

Starlin: It may not. I think people have gotten a little angry at them. I know that at one point the **Comic Journal** ran a little bit on Steve Englehart. They inferred that he had sold out coming back to Marvel and doing work on the Epic Comics. I was infuriated with that because Steve's trouble with Marvel have always been fiancial. He wanted this contract and he finally got it. This was not the first incident. I quickly typed up a petition having them banned from the press conferences up at Marvel. I got about two pages of signatures on it in one day, but by the end of the day I had finally settled down and realized that all I'd be doing is making martyrs out of these characters by doing this so I ended up tossing the petition away. There is reaction to bad judgements in journalism, at least on the professional end. I mean, it's terrible to have something that's not true or something that's been slanted about you put into press, put into type. If someone was walking around, telling lies about you in public your friends and that, you'd have a word to say to them. You're sort of in a strange position when it's the printed word though. It becomes somewhat sacrosanct and it's a peculiar thing to deal with.

CF: Unfortunatley, people have a tendancy to believe what they read.

Starlin: That's true. You know, if it's printed it's true.

CF: Of course this isn't the only field that has had internal journalistic problems like that. Certainly the movie industry is notorious for that. Publications would run pieces on a movie star and they would contact their agent and tell them that if they did not want the piece run, they could always buy the advertising space. Then there are publications which make their living just generating strange rumors, such as the tabloids that are sold in the super-markets. Even the Washington Post and the New York Times have run completely falsified accounts. It's more widespread than just the comics reporting.

Starlin: I think the only one who is going to be able to control it is your industry yourself. The fanzines themselves setting up some sort of self regulatory panel or commision to censure a fanzine that gets out of line. That is really the only control that can be placed on it—self-control.

CF: I think there's an awful lot of professionals that are running around using the fanzines to sharpen an ax.

Starlin: I'm sure there's a lot of that. yes. There's too many professionals taking the opportunity to hatchet their fellow professionals.

CF: Granted, the fan press should not be giving them this opportunity, but there are a lot of professionals that, given the opportunity, are very anxious to use it. It reinforces things. One feeds on the other. And when it does, it almost seems to help sales.

Starlin: I guess there has always been that judgement between the matter of integrity and sales. It's something that you have to work out at your end.

CF: Going back to Dreadstar, you were discussing the long range aspects of Dreadstar and the annual and so forth.

Starlin: Yes, Dreadstar is now a continuous series. It's going on past issue six until either I burn out on it or it's sales drop so badly that its not worth printing. Right now it's doing quite well. We sold a hundred and fifty thousand on the first issue. Between issue six and seven, Dreadstar's first annual should appear. What it will be is actually a reprint of the **Price** book but it's done in color and printed in photo seperation on Baxter paper the same size as the regular Dreadstar series.

CF: But thicker.

Starlin: Another 12 pages thicker as a matter of fact.

CF: Previously that had only appeared

ONLY TWO WORKERS LAGGING TOWARD THE BACK OF THE CREW SEEM FREE FROM THIS CURSE.
THEIR EYES ROAM FREELY, EXAMINING, PROBING, SEEKING FAMILIAR LANDMARKS AND PASSAGEWAYS.
FOR THEM, LINES AND MARKS ON SECRET MAPS ARE BECOMING THE REALITY OF STONE
BUT THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE ROCK IS NOT THEIR SOLE CONCERN.

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in black and white.

Starlin: Previously it only appeared in black and white and only had a print run of seventeen thousand. Dreadstar has caught on now. It should be more than worthwhile, especially with the color on it which is gorgeous. It should be more than worthwhile picking it up. Christy Shields and my wife Donna Graziunds both did a lovely job of coloring it. As far as anything else new with it, we're going along with the story. I'm going to continue to do the whole job.

CF: It almost makes you think that Epic Comics should be called Eclipse Comics, what with Dreadstar and Coyote.

Starlin: It does get a little confusing.

CF: It's unusual that both of the titles are former Eclipse properties. A lot of the work you've done involves political and philosphical concepts. If you were going to put a political label on yourself, what would you call yourself?

Starlin: A realistic liberal. Most of my political awareness came in the late '60s. A lot of the things I believed in at that time, I still do, but a lot of them have been modified with a little bit of reality. I've got a very heavy belief in the work ethic. At the same time I realize that not everybody can do it and I realize that some people are going to need help from someone—if not the government then people. I'm annoyed by a number of things that Reagan does, but at the same time, some of the things he does do make sense to me. I find myself biting my tongue for thinking such. There are portions of his economic policy which I understand. The fact that he's balancing it all out on the backs of the poor still infuriates me.

CF: Is it the job of society to protect everyone and see that they have an income or should people be forced to earn their income unless they are physically disabled.?

Starlin: I believe they should have to earn their income if they are physcally capable of doing it. If they cannot, there should be some help. Also, it's the government's job not to make it so impossible to make a living. We just recently had this truckers' strike. There were some terrible things done during that time. There was a man murdered, there were shootings, there were trucks burned, but it was inexcusable that a government would put a group of it's people into a position where they were against the wall like they were. I cannot condone what they did, but I can understand their outrage and their horror at being put into a position where they can't make a living by the government that they voted into office.

CF: It's the same as what they did to the farmers several years ago when they banned the wheat exports.

Starlin: That's a little bit more complicated than this situation seemed to be. This seemed to be more a situation where this law has upped the cost to them astronomically where it's eating up all their profits.

CF: What the farm thing did a couple of years ago was to keep the Soviet Union from getting wheat, which they got anyway. They stuck the American farmer with wheat which he can no longer sell at a reasonable price. How much government is good for a country?

Starlin: That's a complicated question.

CF: That's the issue that Dreadstar is talking about—how much and what king of government?

Starlin: I think it comes down to, there should be enough government to keep you from being victimized terribly. But at the same time, what the government does is usually complicate a situation that is very forthright and straight with a lot of bureaucratic nonsense, which makes a very simple job that much more complicated. It's like the department of environmental protection granted this huge super fund, but because of the

way government set it up, it could not actually do anything. There was just this huge combersome agency which did a lot of paperwork, but had very few field agents. I don't think it's so much a matter of how much government, but rather the quality of government. I think in a lot of cases in our country, and in every country in the world, it sometimes seems like government's main objective is to create more of itself rather than solving problems.

CF: Isn't that the inherant problem in any institution?

Starlin: I believe that once you get more than three people together, it begins to be a problem, yes. I'm not exactly sure what the answer is. I can come up with a solution in a science fiction story. It's a little more complicated to get it done in real life.

CF: In Dreadstar you have some interesting governments. Are you going to be getting into how they affect their people internally?

Starlin: More so in the instrumentality than the Monarchy. The Monarchy is a pretty straight forward economic power. The Monarchy will eventually fall and the spotlight will mostly be on the Instrumentality which will adapt the worst of both societies. I'm going to be doing things along the line of exploring what could happen in such a society. The instrumentality will be the heavy duty villain in this piece. It will just be a matter of time before it breaks down into one power. I don't know when that's going to happen, but somewhere in the next ten issues.

CF: The danger of theocracy seems to have run through a number of your creations.

Starlin: Well, I went to a parochial school. I shouldn't need to say anything more than that.

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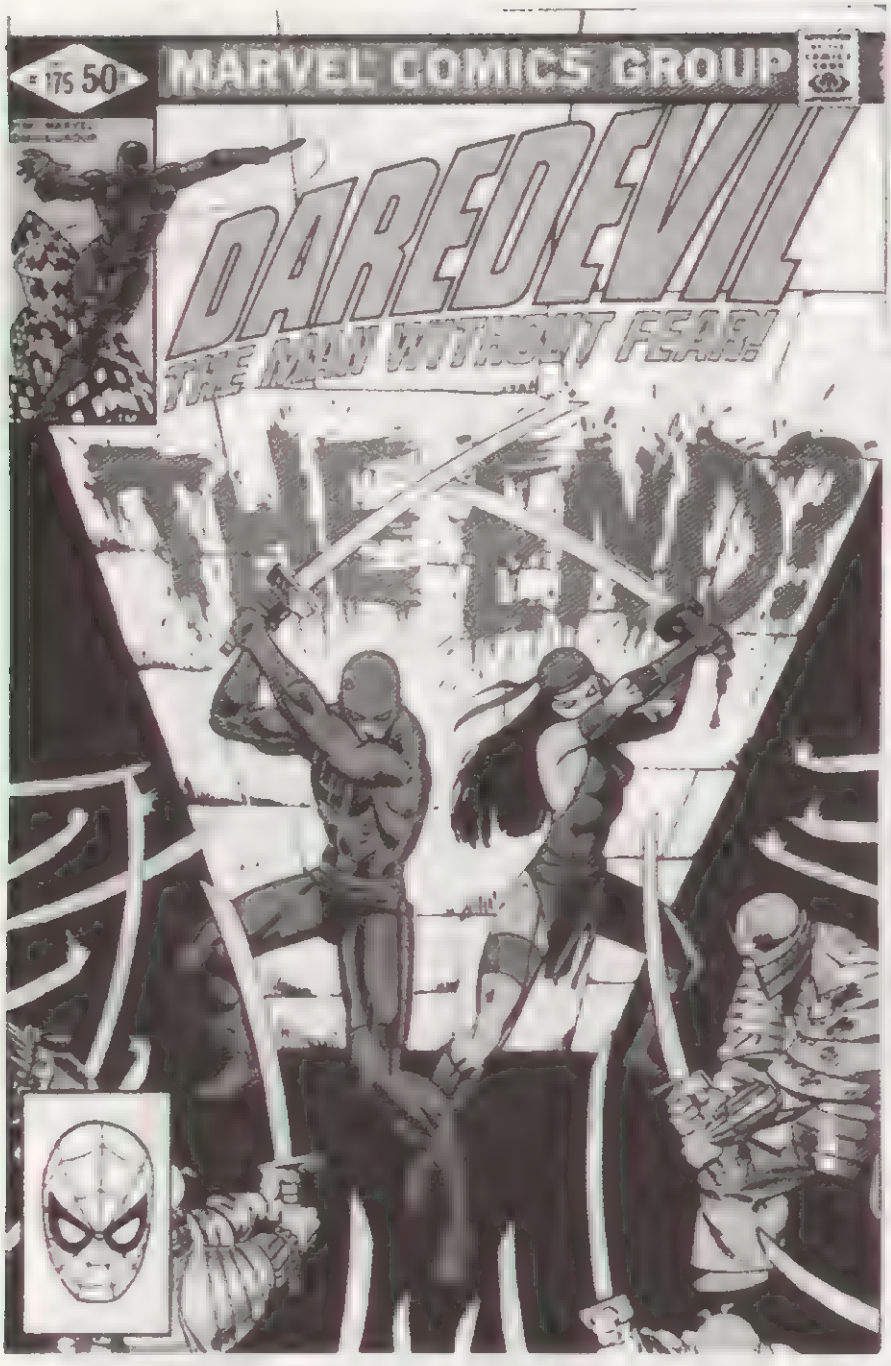

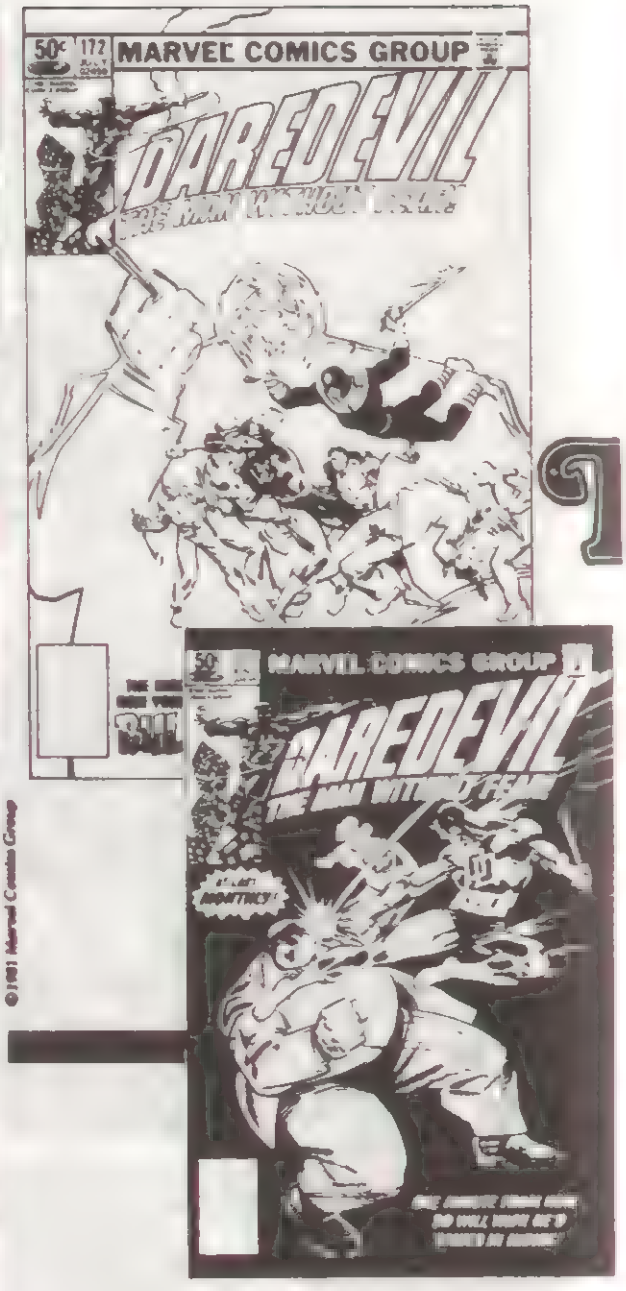

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KALISH: Frank, you've mentioned that you were feeding off the early Marvels. Was that how you got sucked into the industry, through an addiction to comic books?

MILLER: That's the root of it, I'm sure. When I was a little kid, I didn't do much of anything but read comic books. But I stopped reading them when I entered high school—the usual time when kids stop reading comic books. But I did continue to write and draw my own, at home.

KALISH: What type? Were they super-hero comics?

MILLER: They were mostly crime stories. That was because when I stopped reading comic books I started reading detective novels, and became fascinated with the genre. But when I was finishing up high school, I got interested in comics again and I started pursuing doing it for a living. I met Neal [Adams], and through conversations with him—through showing him drawings I did and receiving his criticism—I worked up a portfolio that I could show around. So, yeah—the comics brought me to the comics.

KALISH: Had you intended to pursue an art career for yourself during high school? Was that a professional aim?

MILLER: I didn't study art as much as I studied writing—my English teacher wanted me to become a writer—but I became determined to pursue an art career, and the comics form was on my mind the whole time. I just had reached the point where I wasn't interested in the comics that were coming out. I'm not sure of the exact years, but it was a pretty bad time for comics.

HOWELL: Late 1960s?

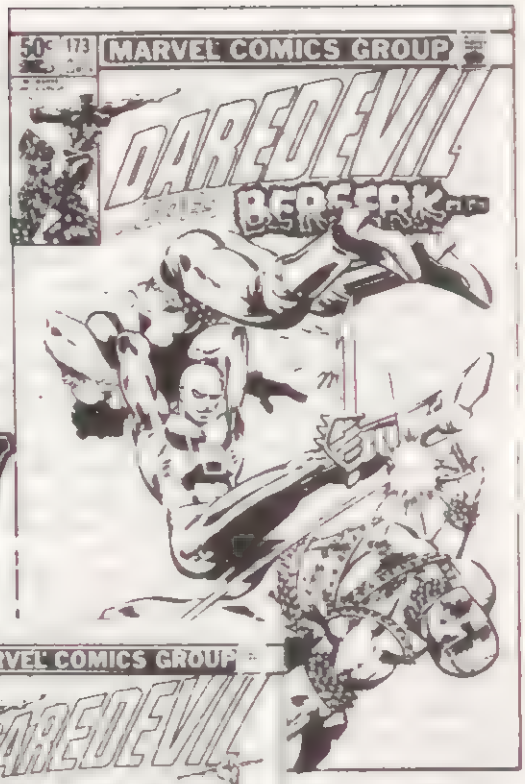
MILLER: Probably, yeah. I missed the whole new breed of comics artists—Wrightson, Kaluta, missed all of them. I was aware of Barry Smith's stuff, but I missed a lot of the young Turks that came in around then, and I've only recently seen their work. So I've been interested in the form since I was eight years old, and it was mainly just not ***enjoying*** the content that stopped me from reading them.

HOWELL: And you didn't start getting actively back into reading comics until you decided on pursuing it as a career?

MILLER: Right. The first job I got from Marvel—which hasn't seen print—was a back-up involving a character I'd never heard of. I was out of touch, and once I started working for Marvel—the third

Richard Howell and Carol Kalish of *COMICS FEATURE* interviewed Frank Miller at his apartment in early Summer, 1981. The interview was transcribed by Kurt Busiek, edited by Howell, and further edited and approved by Frank Miller. *FEATURE* would like to thank Frank Miller for his efforts in preparing this interview transcript, and further thanks to him and to Klaus Janson for this issue's cover.

AN INTERVIEW WITH FRANK MILLER



comics company I worked for—I had to read the comics to find out who the characters were and what they were doing.

HOWELL: What were the other two companies?

MILLER: I worked for Gold Key first, then for DC.

HOWELL: Really? What did you do for Gold Key?

MILLER: A couple of ***TWILIGHT ZONE*** comics. It was very strange work (laughter), mainly because I was doing the inking on them too, 'way before I should have tried to. I've only recently been working on my inking, and it's obvious to me that it's going to be a while before I get to be as good as I'd like to be. But yeah, I did full art jobs for them, and they weren't all ***TWILIGHT ZONE***, but I can't remember what the other ones were.

HOWELL: ***RIPLEY'S BELIEVE IT OR NOT?***

MILLER: Something like that. Nothing super-hero. At DC Paul Levitz gave me some ***WEIRD WAR TALES*** to draw. I also did a one-page love story which has never seen print—thank goodness—and let's see, what else? Again, I was staying away from super-heroes.

HOWELL: Consciously?

MILLER: I think so. I know that when I first had a super-hero to draw, I was scared stiff.

HOWELL: Was that the Marvel job?

MILLER: Yeah.

HOWELL: Who was the character?

MILLER: Doc Samson.

HOWELL: Oh, him. Pretty minor character.

MILLER: Yeah, yeah—one with some charm, though (laughter). The super-hero stuff was a whole new problem for me, because I hadn't been reading them for so long, and I hadn't been trying to draw super-heroes since I was a little kid. So I approached it in terms of learning anatomy, drawing musclemen doing various things, and gained a lot of anatomy knowledge through that. Later I was able to tap into whatever memory I had of the super-hero stuff, of the more lyrical style of fighting and leaping, and like that. But when I first tackled super-heroes it was really frightening to me, 'cause I didn't understand what made them tick, and I thought that if you just drew realistically it would work. It doesn't (laughter).

HOWELL: At that point, did you remember the old stuff that you had been reading and...

MILLER: Well, I remembered it, but I was having such a rough time working—I mean, I'm talking about spending a week on a page—it took me forever to draw anything. So I was taking in as much literal, realistic information as I could, and only paying a bit of attention to the super-hero comics. And at one point—it was a ***SPIDER-MAN*** job—all of a sudden I kicked in and remembered all the comics I'd read as a child, and found a way to apply them directly to the work. Even though if you asked me at the time I ***would*** have remembered such-and-such a story from ***SPIDER-MAN #30***, I hadn't been able to apply it to my work yet. Then, I consciously studied various ways that artists drew comic book fights, and...

HOWELL: And characters.

MILLER: Mm-hm. Well, fights were the biggest problem, though, because they had to be approached strictly on comic book terms. A ***SPIDER-MAN*** fight has nothing to do with a boxing match. Super-hero fights are peculiar to comics because they don't resemble real fights; they don't resemble much of anything real.

HOWELL: How would you describe the differences between the comic book convention of drawing people and drawing fights, and the realistic drawing that you were into before?

MILLER: Saying comic book fights aren't realistic isn't saying anything bad about them. It's just saying that in order to make full use of what comic books can do, you have to stylize the figures and actions. An example of almost the ***perfect*** fight artist in comics would to my mind be Gil Kane. While he incorporates his incredible knowledge of anatomy into his drawing, he exaggerated every blow and every stretch of muscles—to the point where you get something that explodes across the page.

HOWELL: He works a lot with different angles, and different shots.

MILLER: Mm. And sometimes reality just doesn't work on the page. By reality I'm talking photography, I think, because reality isn't just usual. I remember getting punched in the mouth, and I remember what it felt like, and I'm sure that if someone had taken a picture, that it wouldn't have looked very dramatic. But I know what it felt like, and to translate that feeling onto a page, you have to stylize and exaggerate the gesture of the figure that's punching and what effect a punch has on the other body.

HOWELL: So the feeling is more important than the look?

MILLER: Absolutely. The visual has to represent the feeling.

HOWELL: Does that hold true for other aspects of comics art besides fights?

MILLER: Oh, I think so, yeah. The characters are symbols, each built around a rather simple theme. The girlfriends have to be beautiful, because they're sex objects, and the heroes are...

HOWELL: Hero images.

MILLER: It gives the reader something immediately identifiable.

HOWELL: As long as the reader is male, we can toss in.

MILLER: Absolutely, I... hm, that's a real good point (laughter). By saying that the girlfriends are sex objects doesn't mean that that's the whole role of women characters in comics—even though up to now it largely has been. The Elektra character that I worked on isn't a girlfriend, and she—if she's a sex object, she's a very strange one.

HOWELL: That won't stop a lot of the readers (laughter from everyone).

MILLER: Working up a female character who's assertive and heroic—even though Elektra doesn't necessarily qualify as heroic...

HOWELL: Not yet, at least, from what I've seen.

MILLER: But in working up a female character that is assertive, you're working against a lot of visual conventions that are designed to present women as passive. That's the basic problem they've had with Wonder Woman for years. They've got a character who could just be incredible, if they stopped drawing her like a Playboy bunny. Paid attention to what the women bodybuilders are doing. Have you ever seen any pictures of Lisa Lyon?

KALISH: Yes.

MILLER: She's an amazing woman. I've been using photos of her for some of the reference for Elektra.

KALISH: She combines muscularity with femininity. I think that the women body builders are on to a whole new concept for femininity,

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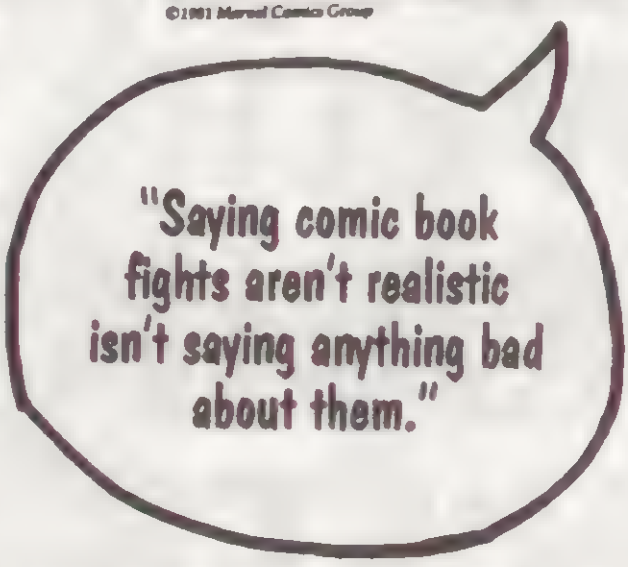


and it's something that comic book artists would do well to pay attention to.

HOWELL: Certainly there's an amount of disadvantage that you have to face with these women athletes when the convention for showing strength in comics for the male characters is showing rippling muscles, and huge biceps and pectorals, and in that case showing power and femininity in comic conventions are mutually exclusive.

MILLER: It depends on your definition of femininity.

HOWELL: It's not mine, it's just the one I've seen most often in comics. I've heard like the different guidelines in class that John Buscema and John Romita talked about, and working within those guidelines, it isn't really possible to show...

KALISH: ...muscles at all on a female figure.

HOWELL and ***MILLER:*** Yeah.

MILLER: I disagree with the guidelines.

HOWELL: John Buscema told me that kneecaps were out, too. (More uproar and giggles)

MILLER: Well, I—it's been a trial and error thing with me. I've found that an attractive muscular woman can be drawn. The only reason that people haven't done it is that people haven't done it. The basic forms of the muscles are beautiful, whether they're on a male or a female. That doesn't mean that a muscular woman will look like a man. The reason I mention Lisa Lyon is that some women bodybuilders do have a very masculine look to them, but Lisa Lyon's look remains very feminine. I'm almost afraid to use that word, because I don't know what definition it's conjuring in your mind.

HOWELL: It's probably going to have different ones depending on whoever hears it.

MILLER: Well, she's a beautiful woman. She's also a very muscular woman. The kind of femininity I'm describing is not at all the meek, passive kind that may be what people think when they hear "femininity." There's a photograph of her holding a barbell on her shoulders, and Arnold Schwartzenegger on the barbell (Howell laughs). But all the while she's a very attractive woman. And I think that adds to her attractiveness, that she's so well-defined.

HOWELL: I was wondering how we got off on this.

MILLER: We were talking about super-hero fighting.

HOWELL: That's right, and...

KALISH: ...the problems with women (mumble).

HOWELL: Right, right. As long as the reader is male, then...

MILLER: The main reason that there hasn't been a strong superheroine—by strong, I mean one having her own book, and gaining popularity—is because neither the writers nor the artists have really been able to handle the concept, or the delivery in a way that's dramatic enough, or—dramatic isn't the right word—deliver it in a way that's attractive and dramatic. There were countless times in comics that the female heroes would go out and conquer armies, but all they really wanted was their man. That's just Karen Page all over again, with super-powers (laughter).

KALISH: Forcibly dragging this interview back (laughter) within the ball park: We've heard various references to the influences that you have cited—or that elements that you have studied—in order to develop your story-telling abilities. What are the influences that you would cite, both as a writer and as an artist?

MILLER: Within comics.

KALISH: Or outside of comics.

MILLER: Within comics, I've studied Gil Kane's work quite a bit in the beginning. I think there was more of his influence in the work I did a year ago than the work I'm doing now. I'm continually studying work I run across. For storytelling, I've studied Bernie Krigstein's work, and Will Eisner's, Harvey Kurtzman's—beyond that, I'm continually picking up jobs by various people. If I run into an Alex Toth job somewhere, I'll study it, of course. In the writing: again, some of the people I just mentioned, Eisner and Kurtzman, and some of the people I'm currently working with, particularly Denny O'Neil. Hmm... and going outside of comics, I mentioned cop shows, a lot of detective novels. Whatever I'm reading at the time has an effect. Movies—I see lots of movies.

KALISH: Is that to examine the actual storytelling, the pacing and the narrative structure, or is that just in part also to get a new input for the visual elements?

MILLER: If a movie is good, I go see it several times. I saw ***ALTERED STATES*** four times. The first time, I saw it strictly as a member of the audience; I didn't allow myself to start thinking about why the director or the writer did what they did. The second time I was a bit more analytical. And if I'm still intrigued, I'll see it several more times, and it will come in on separate levels. Sometimes I'll get material for a story, other times, I'll see how a scene is presented. In ***ALTERED STATES***, the main thing I was studying the fourth time out was the economy of the screenplay. Did you see the movie?

KALISH: No.

MILLER: In the first forty minutes, there's enough material for a two-hour movie. They don't give you an extra shred of information.

And that's the way an artist has to work. You have to absorb what you can from the world around you. Comic books are not enough. The current comic book line may hold some interesting things, but it's certainly not everything that's being done in entertainment, and someone who wants to work in any entertainment field should be aware of what's going on in the other ones. Working with Denny has been very good, because he will mention lines that I could follow, things that I could read that he's aware of. I think a lot of the martial arts stuff I've been getting into with ***DAREDEVIL*** is indirectly attributable to him. I'll mention an idea that's rather unfocused, and he'll suggest looking at Zen Buddhism or something that relates to my idea, and I'll go off and study it.

So there's a lot of research, a lot of reading and seeing—television as well. ***HILL STREET BLUES***—I've got to cite ***HILL STREET BLUES!*** That show is teaching me more about comics than any comic book I've ever seen.

KALISH: I think out of our last four interviews, you're the third who has cited that program.

MILLER: Really? (laughter) That's great. In that show they do continuity. They have, I believe, fourteen lead characters, and the characters all operate as they relate to the Hill Street Station. There are storylines that develop over four or five episodes, but each episode still has a complete story. But the continuity makes you come back each week. You want to find out what happened to the characters. It's really an amazing show. I think it's revolutionary for series television, because it has characters developing throughout it, couples getting together and breaking up, and so on. Characters die—you get to know a character for five episodes, and then he'll get his throat slit. So there's that element of fear—that even the regulars can die.

HOWELL: How would you compare it to the standard soap-opera format as far as that goes? We're not talking quality, just format.

MILLER: They are obviously using soap opera-style continuity, but each episode has within it a complete story. I think that distinguishes it.

KALISH: So you view all aspects of the entertainment media, as...

HOWELL: Fair game?

KALISH: Gist for your creativity?

MILLER: Yeah, it's all fair game—it has to be, really. If you operate in a vacuum, if you do comic books and only read comic books, you're going to produce second-generation comic books.

HOWELL: At least.

KALISH: Or possibly third, depending on whom you base yourself on.

MILLER: Exactly, yes.

KALISH: Which of the entertainment media do you think is closest to comics?

MILLER: Television. Series comic book work is part of a continuity.

"...if you do comic books and only read comic books, you're going to produce second-generation comic books."

"Spider-Man's a great character to draw. All my reservations about the character are in how he talks...he never stops whining."

It's produced under similar circumstances as TV—as far as time you have in which to do it. It's not very subtle, generally, and you have to keep it simple. You have a hero in every story, the hero gets into an adventure, wins—it's largely what happens on adventure TV shows.

HOWELL: Standard format?

MILLER: Exactly. I just did a ***SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL*** that had Spider-Man, The Punisher, and Dr. Octopus... what a bunch of fun guys (laughter). Denny wrote it. We worked very loose on the plot, like we did with last year's annual, and I was just making up bits as I went along. At one point, Octopus just calls up Mayor Koch, to tell him that in the morning five million New Yorkers are going to be dead. "What do you want?" says Koch. "Nothing," says Octopus, "I was just establishing my credentials. Next time I'm going to threaten." (laughter) It's like a ***"Bugs Bunny"*** cartoon. That's what a lot of the fighting is, too.

HOWELL: Good clean fun?

MILLER: I was doing a scene in the ***DAILY BUGLE*** press room in which Spider-Man's fighting Dr. Octopus. Jameson is tossed onto the presses—Spider-Man catches him, and has to do a log rolling job on the presses, holding Jameson and arguing with him at the same time. I was tempted at one point to throw in a Spider-Man version of the Bugs Bunny / Elmer Fudd routine and have Spider-Man kiss Jameson, y'know (laughter) and JJJ say, "Why, you—you—you—"

HOWELL: Wascally Spider-Man.

MILLER: Yeah. He and Bugs Bunny have a lot in common (laughter) when both are in good form.

HOWELL: When they reprise ***"Siegfried,"*** we'll start to worry.

MILLER: Spider-Man's a great character to draw. All my reservations about the character are in how he talks, 'cause his visual is still very confident, and very strong—it's just that he never stops whining.

HOWELL: Do you think that the writer, or in some cases the dialogue person—can have that great an effect on how the character is perceived by the readers?

MILLER: I think Stan did. Had Spider-Man had an indifferent scripting job, I think it would have been a much less exceptional series.

HOWELL: There's a certain argument for that in that a lot of the strips Ditko was working on seemed to have, on the surface, just as much going for them as the ***"Spider-Man"*** series did.

MILLER: THE CREEPER?

HOWELL: THE CREEPER. THE BLUE BEETLE.

MILLER: Really, yeah.

HOWELL: But they didn't catch on. They didn't catch on to the same extent, certainly. They're not here today.

MILLER: In some ways ***THE HAWK AND THE DOVE*** had more. It had some terrific stuff right at the beginning. The tension—the conflict—between the brothers was really good. Also, The Dove flew in the face of what comic books are about.

HOWELL: How so?

MILLER: The Dove was, y'know...

HOWELL: ...impossible...

MILLER: ...if he was right, then there shouldn't be any comic books (laughter). 'Cause all these heroes are wrong.

HOWELL: Oh but no, in Japan, comics are considerably more violent than they are here, and it seems to exorcise people's aggressions somehow.

MILLER: Drawing them certainly does. I'd be nastier if I didn't have Daredevil punch out people every month.

HOWELL: It's like watching football games, getting out the aggressions of the office week.

MILLER: Yeah, yeah. Or kicking the dog when you get home (laughter).

HOWELL: That's a bit less harmless.

MILLER: Conversely, I've noticed that the better my life goes, the less I really feel the need for there to be big fights in what I do, and the more fun I try to put into the product.

HOWELL: You mentioned ***THE HAWK AND THE DOVE*** before, and that reminded me of something Jo Duffy told us: that it's one of the axioms drifting around the Marvel office that Stan thinks any super-hero whose concept is too involved to be explained in one sentence has much less of a chance of being successful.

MILLER: That's something I've heard Stan say, so I can vouch for that, and I think there's a good deal of truth to it; that in comics you're dealing with characters who wear their identities on their chests—and if a child picks up an issue of ***THE FANTASTIC FOUR***, and sees that one of the characters bursts into flame, it's easy to remember which one The Human Torch is.

HOWELL: I hope.

MILLER: And it's a matter of economy. It's a matter of identifying the characters as quickly as possible.

HOWELL: Would you include the characters' motivations in that?

MILLER: Generally, I think. On ***DAREDEVIL***, I'm working with a character that I can describe in a sentence...

HOWELL: Go ahead.

MILLER: Oh, geez.

HOWELL: (chuckle) Dare you.

KALISH: Called your bluff.

MILLER: "A blind lawyer whose remaining senses are heightened."

HOWELL: Okay.

MILLER: It's an essential part of the Daredevil character that he's a lawyer—a defense lawyer, particularly. It's something that I had a hard time dealing with when I first worked on the character, because my first reaction was, "He should be a prosecutor, he hunts down criminals," but it became clear to me at one point—I think Shooter pointed it out to me—that Murdock's concern—and Daredevil's concern—is with the ***victim*** of crime, not with the criminal. And someone falsely charged with a crime is a victim of the crime, as well.

HOWELL: I can recall that surfacing frequently in Shooter's own issues of **DAREDEVIL**, but it doesn't seem to have been too consistent throughout the series.

MILLER: Right.

HOWELL: When you got the character completely for your own—what was it, five issues ago, something like that—did you go through the past issues and figure out what you wanted to keep, and what you thought was inconsistent, or less attractive?

MILLER: What I tried to do was isolate the very basic stuff of the character. Then I looked over what had been done, with that concept, and figured out what should be kept and what shouldn't. There was a sub-plot or two that I dropped, and a couple that I resolved as quickly as possible.

HOWELL: I haven't even noticed the dropped ones.

MILLER: Well, I dropped the one where Matt's secretary fell in love with him.

HOWELL: Oh, that. Yeah.

MILELR: I thought that was a big mistake. A tradition (laughter).

HOWELL: In the **"Ani-Men"** issue, there was one very funny panel: Matt had been kidnapped, and there's three women, all crying sad thought balloons over Matt (laughter).

KALISH: And they were all different...

MILLER: The Karen Page think-a-like contest. (uproarious laughter). But I also found opportunities for new stories in back issues. There'd been a story with The Gladiator, where The Gladiator went crazy.

HOWELL: Oh, that one.

MILLER: Yeah. I didn't agree with that treatment of The Gladiator, but I found it to be an opportunity, because in it Matt said he was going to take the Gladiator's case. And I could have ignored it—I'm sure no one remembered the line—but I thought it would be a good opportunity to show Matt in action as a defense lawyer, and a chance to reform a villain.

KALISH: But why did you choose The Gladiator, of all of Daredevil's foes? You had someone who's one of his oldest foes, introduced in #18, who's been known to have murdered several people (I think he derailed an entire train) and was probably responsible for at least twenty or thirty people dying, and hundreds of people being maimed (because it was a long train...).

MILLER: Yeah, I remember it.

KALISH: He, I think, crashed an airplane at least once, or tried to.

MILLER: He tried to.

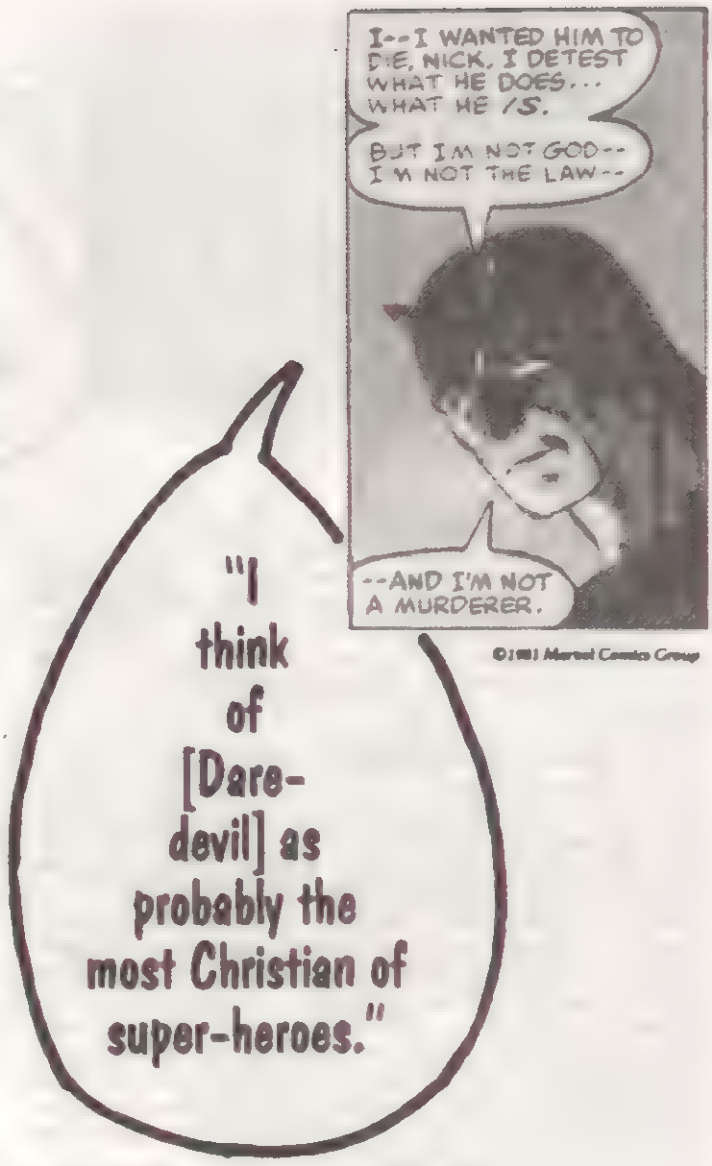
KALISH: And he's been a recurring problem. In his earlier appearances it was less that he was a maniac—someone who really was slipping in his own perceptions at time, putting himself into a gladiatorial setting rather than a real setting—but more that he was an actual criminal, who turned to crime for personal gain. Why did you choose a character whose overriding history as a character has been so negative?

MILLER: That's precisely the point. It gets into my definition of Matt Murdock as a character. I think of him as probably the most Christian of super-heroes, in that he loves his enemies, to some degree, and that The Gladiator's crimes—a series of really vicious, horrible acts—demonstrate this facet of Matt's character more dramatically. We can hate those acts without hating The Gladiator, and that if The Gladiator truly wants to reform, then Matt will do everything in his power to help him. Were I to do a story on reforming The Stilt Man, I just wouldn't have as good a story. It wouldn't be as interesting.

KALISH: Because the drama would be lacking? The contrast wouldn't be as great between the criminal and the reformed character?

MILLER: The greater the character transformation, the greater the drama. To reform a character who is many times over a murderer creates a dramatic enough situation and raises enough questions to make the story worth doing.

KALISH: It seems that you're also fascinated with the question of how much responsibility ordinary citizens have to their society. There's that very odd story with Becky (general giggles from Miller and Kalish) which we won't go into since it seems that a lot of people didn't pick up on what was going on there...


I--I WANTED HIM TO DIE, NICK, I DETEST WHAT HE DOES... WHAT HE IS.
BUT I AM NOT GOD-- I'M NOT THE LAW--
--AND I'M NOT A MURDERER.
"I think of [Daredevil] as probably the most Christian of super-heroes."
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MILLER: I think that's safe to say.

KALISH: But part of that story was the underlying element that if Becky **had** spoken up when she should have two years prior to the action of the story, at least some of the train of events which did take place never would have happened. At the same time, though, Daredevil, through his own brutalizing experience, realized part of what it's like to be a victim; something which I don't think he's ever suffered through before. It seemed the major emphasis in that story seemed to be that the citizen had a responsibility to guard society, to warn other people, and to prevent other people from becoming victims. Now you have Matt deciding that a very, very proven evil should be let loose in society again. That seems to be a very personal decision on his part.

MILLER: Only in that he doesn't believe that this is the same man who committed those crimes. There is a line where he specifically says that the man is being charged with the Gladiator's crimes, but The Gladiator no longer exists in his mind, so they would be charging the wrong man.

It's interesting that all these issues come into play when all I really want to do is fool around with characters and play them off one another. The whole "Gladiator" thing comes straight from a stray line that Daredevil says in an issue that I didn't write. At first all I wanted to do was put Matt through the paces of actually defending a criminal, which he hasn't done for a long time.

KALISH: I think the Leap Frog case was the last time we saw him really active in court...

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"Heather's the toughest [character] of the bunch, because the cliches she represents are *so* negative..."

MILLER: Yeah... Almost any story about a lawyer is going to deal with certain difficult problems: duty to society, culpability. The question for me, then, is whether to skirt them or to confront them. Everything is material, these issues are good matter for stories. The stories aren't designed to raise the issues.

KALISH: The issues are designed to illuminate the characters...?

MILLER: They come as a consequence of the chemistry. Can I do a story in ***DAREDEVIL***, with The Punisher, which is a conflict between a vigilante versus a lawyer. The Becky story was also largely a story to make her more interesting. Like most of the supporting cast in the book, she was unfocused. So I more or less tried to focus a story around her as well. And I'm doing the same thing with the other members of the cast, trying to feature them.

HOWELL: Do you think that's almost going to be a recurring cycle—or will this featuring them in turn bring them up to the point where you no longer have to fashion issues that feature them? Once they're re-established in the reader's mind, that is.

MILLER: Once they're re-established, I'll have a good deal more freedom of how to play them. Once Becky is a consistent personality, once people have seen enough of her to care for her, then I get to exploit that. The same thing with Foggy. Throughout the series, he's been treated inconsistently. One question that has never been resolved is **why** he's Matt's partner.

KALISH: Yes.

MILLER: There's never been any indication that he's a good lawyer, or good at anything else. So I had to figure it out in my mind what it is that Foggy does. And in order to do that, I had to readjust my perspective on him. What I came up with, was, if you remember the origin story, there's a panel where Foggy remarks, "Gee, I gotta study all night, but you just fly through the classes!" Well, I figure as a result of all that studying, Foggy is a human encyclopedia of law. He can remember anything that happened in court anywhere in the country—ever—and Matt often can't. So without Foggy, Matt flounders a bit. He can make all the abstract points in the world, and he's very intelligent, but it's Foggy who remembers "the such-and-such decision."

HOWELL: The precedent.

MILLER: So the two need each other as a team. And that gives Foggy a bit more credibility. While he is a funny character, there is really no reason he should be a clown.

KALISH: Do you think any character should be primarily a clown?

MILLER: Some people **are** funny. Some people I have known—who are not clowns, but by being human beings—keep me laughing. And that's Foggy. I don't think he's stupid. It would make no sense for him to be stupid. He's just the sort of guy who makes the wrong jokes at parties, and is rather oblivious to what goes on around him. And if he sits in a chair, there's a good chance it will break. He can be a very appealing character.

Heather is another problem. She's got to be the most unpopular girl friend in comics. (laughs) I could write her out of the book if I want, it's my option, but I've made up my mind not to: I've really come to like the version of her I use. It's just been rather tough describing that version to a really antagonistic audience. (laughs)

KALISH: She seems to have been such a bubblehead for so long. Is she a bubblehead?

MILLER: No.

HOWELL: Did you ever hear Marv [Wolfman]'s origin of Heather as a "Challenger of the Unknown?" (Miller looks aghast). Marv reported in FOOM or somewhere that, according to him, Heather came down with a deadly **and** terminal disease at one point, and figured it was all over. Then she was cured almost miraculously, and it changed her life. It affects different people different ways: The Fantastic Four decided to devote their lives to fighting evil; the Challengers thought they were living on borrowed time anyway, so they could take lots of chances; Heather decided she wouldn't take anything seriously anymore.*

MILLER: (Laughs) That's very funny! That's got a lot of charm. I didn't hear that before, so that's not part of the material I had to work with when I put together my version of Heather. I regard her as, on one level, a spoiled brat—she's used to having whatever she wants. She appears to be very, very flighty, brainless, very childlike—because she's daddy's little girl—but I think there's some harder stuff underneath. For instance, I'm doing a story where Matt loses his radar sense, is out hunting for trouble and she's totally freaked out worried for him, because he obviously doesn't behave as well as he used to. And she decides to help him. In fact, she risks her life for him. So she's not just an airhead.

HOWELL: Except for being a more sophisticated, experienced, worldly woman, Heather sounds a lot like The Wasp in her early years—except Jan had the benefit of being tutored by somebody who was a superhero. Matt is not interested in tutoring Heather in super-heroic ways, naturally enough.

MILLER: There's also another problem with doing a character who is female. There are certain alarms you can set off: the flighty woman who changes her mind at the drop of a hat is such a stereotype, and such a horrible one, that it makes people very angry. However, legitimate characters may be that way.

HOWELL: Doesn't deny that they really exist.

MILLER: No. You can have a male character who works out every morning for two hours, drinks beer, and watches football. And he can still be a very good character.

Yeah, Heather's the toughest one of the bunch, because the cliches she seems to represent are **so** negative, and the readers, the letters that come in...

* All efforts to track this story down before press time failed, but Howell insists that it appeared, more or less intact, in an issue of ***FOOM*** which was released during Marv Wolfman's days as writer/editor of ***DAREDEVIL***. Can anyone corroborate this?

KALISH: "Dump Heather!"
MILLER: A nice little review, and then "get rid of Heather" at the bottom. "Please shoot Heather." Stuff like that.
HOWELL: Do you feel you're going against the wishes of what the audience wants to see?
MILLER: Yes. I don't believe it's the responsibility of the artist to spoonfeed the audience what they want, because the artist is ***bringing*** something to the audience, and just as the artist can learn from his audience, the audience can learn from the artist. I could just drop Heather and come up with a character that would be much more immediately liked—at one point, I almost did. But I wanted to work on Heather a little bit more, and I think she can work, it's just going to take a while. With Becky, the problem was that nobody knew who she was. With Heather, they think they know, and they don't like her.
HOWELL: Was it your decision to remove The Black Widow after her last tenure?
MILLER: No, that was a decision made from outside the book. I believe Roger was told that Marvel was doing another series with her. For what it's worth, I didn't like her. I felt she had become a character that was so...She had become several things at once. When she was first created she had such a great conflict built into her. She was a Russian spy who fell in love with an American industrialist. Communism versus capitalism. Love vs. Duty. But I just couldn't figure out who the hell she was today. Having an affair with a god here, mooning over the old involvement with Hawkeye, she was ***this***, then went through ***that***, and now does this, this, and ***this***.
HOWELL: Well, in your own way, you're dealing with characters who have gotten to that point already, have been simplifying them, and boiling them down to what the essence of their character is. Do you think that's a natural process of these continuing series? Now and then things have to be reduced...
MILLER: Distilled.
HOWELL: Yeah, distilled to the point where the reader can once again latch onto things quickly?
MILLER: I think that's what's been happening in the field lately. A lot of that is because of Jim Shooter. I think that's one of the most positive things he's done for his company—he's made people think in terms of the basic concept of a character, and hold to it. Because comic book writers have a larger degree of freedom than say, television writers, they will develop characters and change them, often draw the characters away from their original concepts. In some cases, this can be really wonderful, like some of the stuff that Jim Starlin did.
HOWELL: ***CAPTAIN MARVEL*** and ***WARLOCK***?
MILLER: He took them far afield, but it was a fun ride. But in Marvel's interest as a company which has to keep presenting the characters to new audiences, year after year, it's better to have the characters very easily identifiable. In Daredevil's case, I thought that each successive writer had disagreed with what had gone before, that what Marv did had very little in common with what Shooter did, that what McKenzie did had little to do with what Shooter did, etc.
HOWELL: There were some surface continuities, like Shooter was concerned with Daredevil being concerned with victims, for instance, and I believe it was Marv who set up the storefront....
MILLER: Uh-huh.
HOWELL: ...so they have this immediate access point to these victims.
MILLER: And there were some things which could only happen during the confusion when the writers switch. Foggy's wife was kidnapped...he just forgot about it for about two years. And there was this big mystery about who hired Paladin to hunt down The Purple Man, but you never found out. So what I've had to do is pick and choose, and extrapolate new material of my own.
HOWELL: Speaking of Foggy's wife, is she just window dressing on the list of supporting characters?
MILLER: Yes. One of the problems with ***DAREDEVIL*** is that it has a supporting cast that with the exception of Foggy, is all female. And coming on the book, I found that they all had the same color hair. And they all had to be gorgeous.
KALISH: Very confusing.
MILLER: So I've been working on it. I changed Becky's hair color to brown.
KALISH: She's supposed to be plain anyway.
MILLER: (Laughs) I gave them various props and features to distinguish them from each other.

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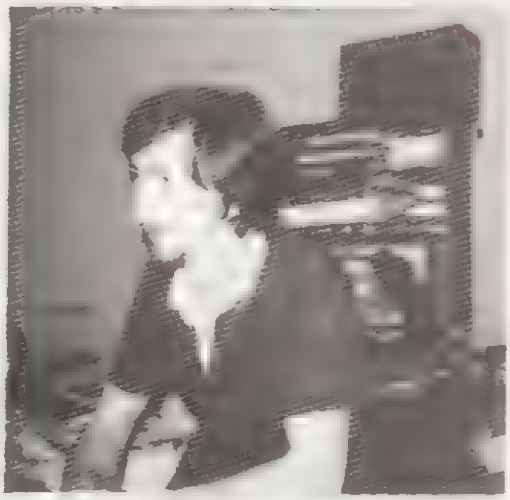
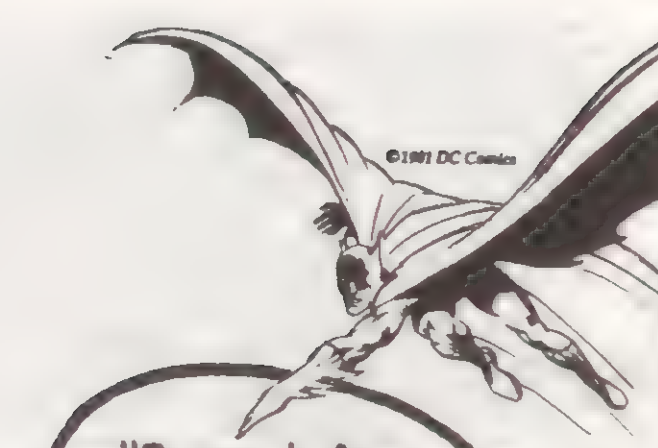


KALISH: Are there plans to introduce more male supporting characters?
MILLER: The storefront will be going out of business.
HOWELL: I noticed the financial trouble.
MILLER: Reagan cut the budget. (Laughs)
KALISH: Nobody's been working. Neither Matt nor Foggy has been in the office for weeks.
MILLER: That's another problem. I'm trying to get them closer to the original concept. They're going to get an office downtown, and they're going to be very expensive lawyers. A new team is going to take over the storefront, to give me the option of doing stories with impoverished clients. The problem with the storefront is that



"Batman's focus is on the criminal, Daredevil's is on the victim. That's a crucial difference."

Nelson and Murdock are supposed to be the very best legal team in the country—F. Lee Bailey caliber—and 90% of the clients that would come to the storefront would be welfare claims, hassles with Con Ed and like that which would not involve challenging precedents. But it *is* in character for Matt to sponsor something like that. It's also in character for him to be smart enough to have a big tax write-off. So that is what's being done with that. There will be some characters introduced in the process. I'm trying to do this without cramming everybody in, trying to make it an interesting enough sequence of issues that accomplish what I want to do. You can't be too abrupt. It's cheating.

HOWELL: What would you say to the popular, but somewhat outdated, opinion that Daredevil is Marvel's Batman?

MILLER: I'd say The Punisher is Marvel's Batman.

KALISH: Really? Why?

MILLER: Because he's Batman without his impurities. The side of Batman that makes him spore the criminals is something that's added on. It's not part of the basic concept of his character.

HOWELL: That's kind of an interesting analysis of a virtue as a failing.

MILLER: An impurity, perhaps. Batman's a character I would love to sink my teeth into, because I can see all kinds of things I could do with him. But as far as comparing him to Daredevil, I'd say Daredevil's basic concept is very dissimilar. I see Daredevil as someone who operates on a basic motive of love for seeking out justice.

KALISH: It's positive motivation?

MILLER: Yes. And I see Batman's as negative. He's punishing those who killed his parents. Batman's focus is on the criminal, Daredevil's is on the victim. That's a crucial different. However, there are obviously **close** visual resemblences. The whole "creature of the night" riff in Daredevil obviously relates to and comes from Batman. Because Daredevil's blind, it seems to me very obvious that he'd want to operate in the darkness—it's to his advantage to have his enemies as blind as he is. And the whole "devil" motif conjures some nice visuals. But I'm also trying to develop him as a guy with a terrific sense of humor, who scares criminals and has a great time doing it. Like The Creeper, he laughs and laughs and laughs, and thinks, "Jeez, they're buying it!" I want to work some of that into his characterization. He was conceived to be a rather joyous character originally, and I want to bring some of that back, without losing some of the grittier elements of the world he operates in.

HOWELL: This has been a question that has plagued the readership ever since Daredevil was created: What's the difference—not in origin, but in handling—between Daredevil and Spider-Man?

MILLER: Oh! That's a good question. Daredevil's older. I think he's thirty.

HOWELL: I think that's justifiable.

MILLER: An established lawyer should be forty, but that's a bit old for a superhero. So, I'd say he's thirty. With his concern for the victim, he's a much more consciously moral character than Spider-Man. He's very concerned with the issues involved with each question or decision he faces and he thinks out exactly what each is before he does it.

HOWELL: So he's not a spur-of-the-moment type?

MILLER: No. The spur of the moment stuff is when he's out on the roof-tops having a great time. But that's him being a kid, the acrobat his father never let him be. Because of his constant concern on morality, I think he's different than Spider-Man, who's really wrapped up in himself. Daredevil's concerns are with the right and wrong of the world around him. Spider-Man's concerned with himself. The only similarities I've seen is the way they talk, that "snappy patter" stuff (which Daredevil doesn't do anymore) and the fact that they both swung from lines (which Daredevil doesn't do anymore). I've tried to make him less like Spider-Man.

KALISH: Do you think Daredevil actually has an analogy? Another character who's very close to him in attitude? You don't have to draw on comics here.

MILLER: Oh! In that case, I see a little of what I'm after in a character like Kojak, even though visually, they're different. (laughs) A moral man in an amoral circumstance. I think that kind of character, if he were real, would be an anchor to his friends—someone who they know they could count on.

HOWELL: A little like The Question, though not taken that far.

MILLER: Not taken that far at all.

HOWELL: Is there a possibility Daredevil's moral sense could lead him to becoming an enemy of the people?

MILLER: I don't believe so. I mean, his whole emphasis on law...

KALISH: Is Daredevil a vigilante? Is he out to uphold the law, or is he a crusader for justice?

MILLER: That's one of the funny problems of the character. I think

DEATH FLAMES FROM THE DEACON'S BATON BUT FAILS TO REACH ITS MARK
THE SWORD SNATCHES THE BATON'S FIERY RAYS FROM THE VERY AIR
©1983 J.P. Starlin

that and finally was able to sell two jobs to Joe Orlando for his mystery books. They were a couple of two pagers. I decided at that point, seeing as how my finances back in Detroit were dwindling to next to nothing, that I might as well shoot the whole wad and I took a shot at going to New York. I was lucky enough to show up there at the time when they were hiring anybody who came across the state line with a pencil in their hand. I started working up at Marvel doing cover layouts for other artists to finish off. I worked with John Romita a little bit doing layouts on Spiderman for him so that he could catch up with his dead-line. I eventually got work up there doing a few covers, a horror story, a love story here and there. I finally did Iron Man for two issues and went on from there.

CF: When you first began doing the amateur strips, were you still in high school?

Starlin: I started doing them in high school and went on through the service. In the Navy I was doing Dr. Weird and the American Eagle which is – The American Eagle is quite a story all in itself. When I did it I was stationed in the Phillipines, and it was printed and I had it sent back to me when it was printed. Like a fool I showed it around. At the time it was kind of radical for comic books and within two months I found myself up on charges in the service on – some of the charges were based on what I'd done in the books – unmilitary conduct and a couple of other charges I've forgotten. There were thirty-six of them leveled against me at the time. All of them ended up getting thrown out because the people who were doing it were obviously out to get me for reasons of their own.

CF: Why were they after you?

Starlin: Bad attitude on my part. It was the Vietnam war and a lot of that sort of thing went on at that point.

CF: So you were a dove in Vietnam?

Starlin: It didn't start out like that. I was raised in Detroit during the '60s – it was about '68 – and there were anti-war protests going on in other parts of the country, but Detroit was still very blue collar, middle-class. I joined the service, was sent over to Sicily for a year and a half and had a good time there; I rather enjoyed it. I was doing aerial photography so that the Italian government could get maps for what Sicily looked like. They hadn't had any since World War II. I worked in civilian clothes and was making good money at the time. According to the Sicilian standard of living, a Navy serviceman was making a pretty good living. My tour of duty in Sicily ended and by that time the anti-war sentiment had grown so strong that even folks in the service like myself were beginning to question the morality of what our country was doing. I suddenly found myself over there on my next tour. I didn't like it. I made it very clear that I wasn't happy about what I was doing and they didn't like it. A lot of times I was given bad assignments because of things I was stupid enough to say out loud.

CF: What did you object to about the U.S. presence in Nam?

Starlin: Let me put it this way; I was an aerial photographer. I'd be taking pictures, I'd bring them back and develop them and everything looked like craters on the moon from these shots I had. Everything was bombed out. It didn't seem to make much sense to me why we were over there. It seemed like we were doing nothing but protecting our commerical in-

downplayed. She's a secretary, she's a character, and...oh, yeah...she's in a wheel chair. No big deal about it. By and large, that's what I intend to do with her—that's a statement of its own. That's also the reason I didn't make that lady D.A. character a love interest: which occurred to me. I simply want her to function as Matt's Hamilton Burger, with **no** reference to her sex. That's really the way to do it. You don't have to make an issue of it. You can have people obviously doing their jobs, and doing them well. I notice that on TV, they make some effort towards having incidental characters whose color or sex is not traditional. I remember one TV show I saw once. There was a black blind psychiatrist, and they made no mention of the fact that he was blind or black. This was a number of years ago when probably both were issues.

KALISH: Sounds interesting.

HOWELL: It also means more awareness, at least on the part of the artist.

MILLER: I do believe that to some degree, an artist owes a certain amount of awareness to his audience. If I made every black character in ***DAREDEVIL*** a street punk, I'd be implying something. I would be perpetuating something that isn't just an oversimplification—it's a lie.

KALISH: This ties in a little before about what you were saying about education. It seems that even when you're doing comics, like ***DAREDEVIL***, you're aware of their educational nature, socialization value—maybe even real hard facts. Do you think that all comic books can carry that same impact?

MILLER: I think that any story where you've got the good guy slugging the bad guy carries with it a certain educational message. Bad guys lose, good guys win. Right and wrong. These are morality plays—even the ones that get so complex that we're not sure which one's the good guy. But these complex ones are rare. By and large, in comics, the lead character is on the side of good. And in order to do a story about someone on the side of good, you have to define what good is. If you do a story in which Dr. Doom is out to conquer the world and the Fantastic Four is to stop him, you're saying it's bad to control people. Or, if you do a story where Matt Murdock is in love with his secretary, but because he is blind, he can't tell her, because she'd have to pity him, you're saying something horrible about blind people. You're saying they can only be loved as objects of pity. So there are certain implicit statements in whatever you do.

HOWELL: It has a certain amount of propaganda impact, too.

MILLER: It's not my intention to make propaganda. My one attempt at it was a dismal failure. That was the "Angel Dust" story, and having read it since, I can see why. It was just too preachy. I don't think I do propaganda, now because with propaganda, your material is designed to convey a certain message, and fails as entertainment. I believe any moral issues should come from the material, not be imposed on it.

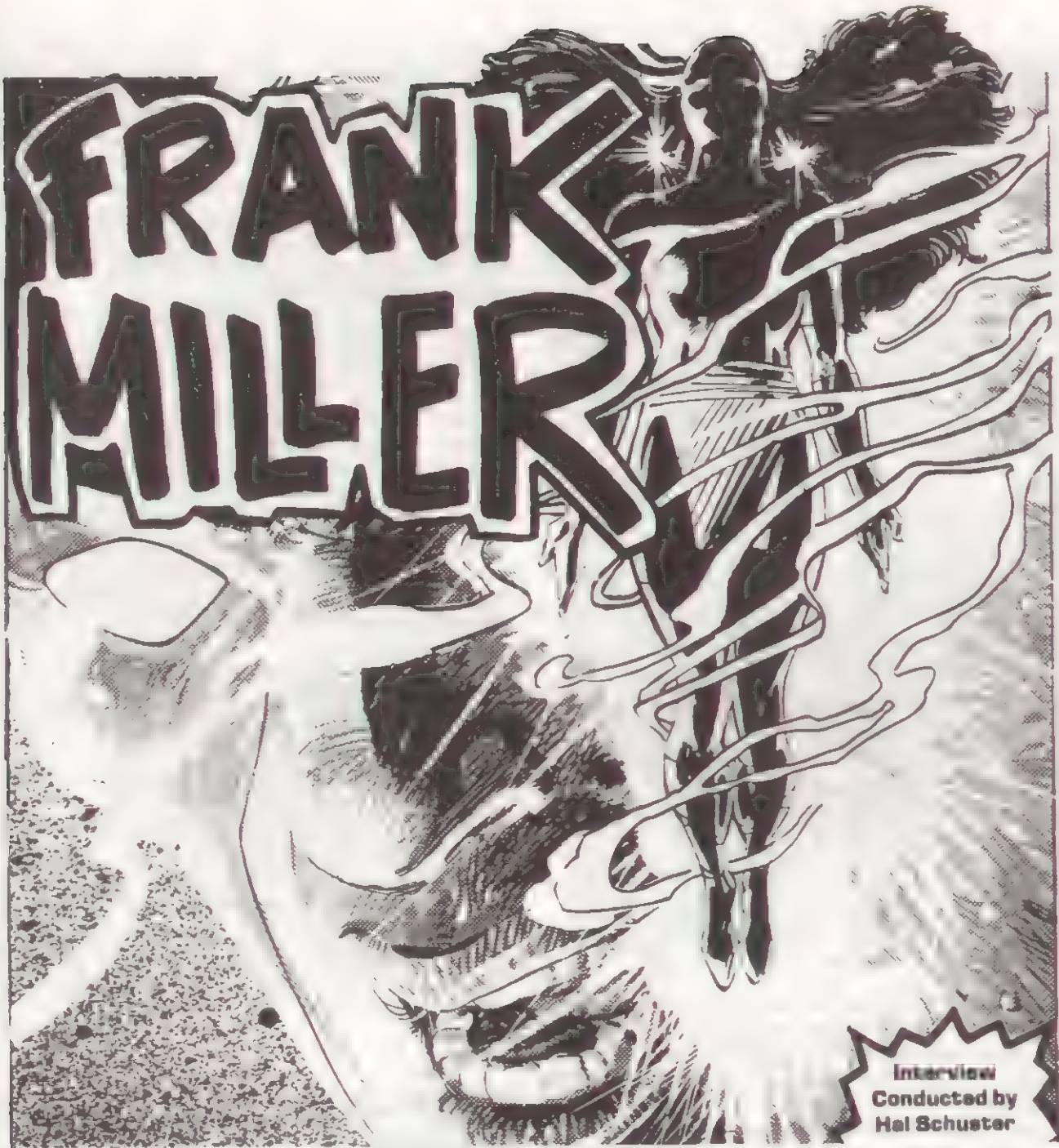
HOWELL: You've spoken a couple of times of some responsibility to your readers. Who are they?

MILLER: Oh-Oh! (Laughs) I just got called. That's a good question. I don't know if anyone's checked. I have to assume that my readers include a large number of young children. But they're not the ones who write most of the letters. At least, with ***DAREDEVIL*** most of the people who write the letters are obviously literate enough to write a well-composed letter. Obviously, there are a lot of adult readers out there. But I have been instructed, and will continue to gear my material ***at least*** to the understanding of children.

HOWELL: Do you feel that necessarily weakens it at all?

MILLER: No. It's just the rules I play by. I've been hired to do morality plays that children can read for Marvel Comics, and I'm having a great time doing them the way I'm doing them. They don't have to be shallow.

FRANK MILLER



Interview
Conducted by
Hal Schuster

CF: When did you first become interested in comics?

Miller: Since I was a little kid. When I was a little kid I read Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes. Later on, when I was in my early teens, I got into Spiderman and the Fantastic Four. A rather traditional introduction.

CF: Did you continue to read and be interested in comics. I believe you mention in another interview that there was an interruption.

Miller: I followed the course that most people actually follow, it's just that at one point in my life I stopped being interested in comics. I discovered things like girls and that sort of thing and real books and movies; I maintained my interest in the form of comics, I just became less interested with the content.

CF: Was there a particular kind of comic book you were interested in at that time?

Miller: Super-heroes came to interest me less and less and at the time that was all that was really being published. I just became less interested when I started taking literature courses and such and discovering the world of fiction without pictures.

CF: What formal training, if any, did you receive?

Miller: There was formal training through high school. I took art classes, and drawing classes and art history classes and at the same time studied English. In fact I had two teachers, one my English teacher and one my art teacher, who both insisted that I follow their subject as a career. The art teacher wanted me to study art and the English teacher wanted me to study English. Incidentally, I found a way to do both.

CF: What do you consider yourself? John Byrne, for example, considers himself a writer who can draw.

Miller: I consider myself a cartoonist. I think that's the best word to describe what I do. I make stories with words and pictures. I couldn't consider myself a writer or an artist first. What I do is I'm a cartoonist.

CF: You couldn't seperate the one from the other; it's the combination of the two?

Miller: My whole interest and my whole job is to combine the two. Seperating them, even for the sake of argument, really doesn't mean that much to me. I think the form has suffered greatly because the discipline has to be split in two like that. It is a single craft that has been broken into an assembly line proces. It's not two seperate jobs; it's one job broken into several pieces and different people do it.

CF: That's probably why so many of the most popular works have been actually created by one man, whether it's Milton Caniff of Will Eisner...

Miller: Or two people who work so well in tandem that they might as well be the same person, like for the time

that Denny O'Neil and Neal Adams worked together so well. You read their stuff and you'd think that the two were one person because their thinking is so in concert.

CF: Which artists that preceeded you do you tend to identify with?

Miller: I absorb whatever I can. Whatever work excites me is bound to have some kind of an effect on me. When I started working in the field I started exploring what had been done and I discovered Bernie Krigstein and Will Eisner and I was completely wrapped up in what they did for a while. Now I'm studing Japanese comics ans French comics. They're obviously having an effect on what I do.

CF: If nothing else you're heroes are tending to go to Japan.

Miller: Right, they'll be going there.

CF: When you're approaching the comic page, do you find that you tend to fall into a particular school of artists, say like Noel Sickles and the artists who followed him or Neal Adams who seems to be following Stan Drake and establishing a very different type of approach?

Miller: What I'm after right now is to break free from following any particular school. Jean Giraud [Moebius] in France, under all the different names he used, is inspiring to me. He shows that an artist can explore any number of routes, depending on what the project is and depending on whether he wants to draw from himself or from what came before. I'm mainly trying to absorb as much as I can, to think as much as I can, to explore as much as I can, rather than deciding that I will follow a particular path and carry on a particular tradition. I'd rather just - it's really just a process of expanding and exploring rather than perpetuating.

CF: When you create a story page, do you tend to create the entire script and plot or do you tend to draw and the story kind of creates itself as you are laying out the visuals or...

Miller: I've worked in a variety of different methods. Ever since I started writing my own material, it's always been up to me how I proceed with it. The method that I've settled on, at least for the moment, it very old fashioned, very traditional. I plot my story and then I write myself an entire script and then I set about illustrating it. I'll often change the scripts as I'm illustrating it or change, in fact, the plot as I'm illustrating it, but I work from a very traditional outline with panel descriptions on the script page and everything.

CF: When you're creating a story do you fill in all of the background, as if you were creating a universe and then set your characters within it or do you tend to create those parts as you need them?

Miller: Once I had the concept together of Ronin I set out describing what sort of world he lived in, but the world that developed from it was very much an extension of the principal characters in the series. While I worked on very complete descriptions, in fact the entire country in the series, we never see anything but Manhattan. There's a lot of research, a lot of planning, there's a lot of history behind the characters that no one will ever see. But with that background I can write and know what I'm talking about.

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CF: It sounds very similar to a process that Robert Heinlein described in that he sets up every small detail about his entire universe and then he only shows the readers the parts that are relevant to the story he's telling, but he needs the background to know where everything fits.

Miller: Right.

CF: So you work on a similar process.

Miller: Well, it's necessary. To figure out how someone speaks, for example, you have to know their history very well. All that I would present is his speech but, by doing his background, I make his speech apply to his history right. I do things that imply a greater world. Without a greater world worked out, it really implies nothing.

CF: When you first started in comics, your first work was for Gold Key, is that correct?

Miller: My first work was for Gold Key Comics, yes.

CF: What did you do there?

Miller: I did some **Twilight Zone** comics.

CF: Were you drawing or drawing and writing?

Miller: Just drawing at the time.

CF: And it was being handled full-script?

Miller: Full-script every time at Gold Key; that's the way they work.

CF: Where did you go from there?

Miller: I worked for DC doing horror stories and weird war stories and that sort of thing. Then to Marvel – I'd been trying to break into Marvel all along. They were the tough ones to break into because they had no anthology titles. I hadn't even drawn a super-hero. I got an assignment of a character I'd never heard of named Doc Sampson. I set about trying to draw super-heroes and had a bitch of a time figuring out how to draw them because I was simply trying to draw muscular men. It was before I discovered the dynamics involved in drawing super-heroes. Once I discovered it, I got into it quite a bit, but it was a very difficult subject for me.

CF: This is where you mentioned you were taking a great deal of time to do each page.

Denny O'Neil and Frank Miller

LIKE THE MAN SAID-- THERE'S NO TIME FOR MOURNING.
NATASHA YOU KNOW YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE INVOLVED IN THIS
SURE I DO. WE'VE BEEN FRIENDS SINCE WAY BACK.
MORE THAN FRIENDS...
FRIENDS.
© 1981 Marvel Comics

Miller: Oh yes. It was ridiculous. I'd spend a week penciling a single page.

CF: Was **Daredevil** the first regular series you did?

Miller: Absolutely.

CF: I guess at the time they were willing to give you **Daredevil**, even though you were a new artist, because it was considered a very low selling series.

Miller: I requested the title after doing several issues of **Peter Parker** that guest-starred Daredevil. I discovered that I liked this character that I had never read. Mary Jo Duffy took the chance along with Jim Shooter of letting me work on the series. At the time it was a very low profile title. I believe Gene Colan had run screaming off it by then, after doing about a million issues. It was a title that was doing poorly, so it was something that you could start a beginner on.

CF: You were working with Roger McKenzie at that time?

Miller: That's right, my first nine issues were done with him.

CF: Was he the first writer that you had worked with on a somewhat long term basis?

Miller: I had worked with Bill Mantlo for two issues; that

had been my longest run before that.

CF: Did your style mesh with Roger's?

Miller: Oh sure. It seemed to work out very well.

CF: Then you took over the writing chores after a period.

Miller: Eventually, yes.

CF: That's when the book began to turn around in sales I believe.

Miller: I think that's about when it happened.

CF: To what do you attribute the radical change in sales? You really didn't handle the character that much differently then the way the character was conceived, and yet the character had previously not sold well.

Miller: I would hope that the reason that the material sold was that it was energetic and sincere and the stories were good. It also introduced a very strong female character into the series, which is something I believe that the audience is generally very hungry for, because it's something relatively rare in comics. What I did was I just listened very closely whenever Denny spoke about writing comics and started using material that I'd been thinking about for a long time. I started playing with the character of Daredevil a great deal. I started trying to find ways for the character to work for me which is something that I could only do writing it myself.

CF: Do you feel that you actually changed the character?

Miller: I certainly updated him. There were many things about that character that simply wouldn't work in this decade. He had an origin that was very much a product of 1950s science-fiction movies. In fact it was the same origin of virtually every Marvel character.

CF: Radiation.

Miller: Yeah, Daredevil was bitten by a radioactive truck you might say. I also worked on integrating the super-hero into a world of crime. That's with the emphasis on civilian crime not super-villains. Many of the things that I did come from applying the 40s and 50s crime movies and crime fiction to a super-hero motif. That's something that hasn't been done recently and therefore got some attention.

CF: A lot of it seems to harken back to Will Eisner's Spirit a great deal. Was that conscious?

Miller: It was as conscious as could be because at the time I was completely enamored with Will Eisner's work. It had a very direct effect on me. I tend to research a lot of material and get very excited by certain material and it has an immediate effect on me.

CF: Are you familiar with Jerry Grandenetti's or Frank Robbins' work?

Miller: Oh yes, definitely Frank Robbins.

CF: There seems to be a certain amount of those styles in your work. Several times while you were working on Daredevil, he seemed to take on similarities to the Batman. Do you view them as similar characters?

Miller: I view them as operating in a similar world. They're very different. Batman is a revenge oriented character and Daredevil is a humanitarian. He's a very troubled humanitarian; he has a very hard time being a humanitarian but he is a humanitarian. He's concerned

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much more with the victim than the perpetrator of the crime. Batman's focus is on the perpetrator of the crime. Batman is getting his revenge on all criminals for what happened to his parents. Daredevil, on the other hand, is trying to keep people from becoming victims like his father was.

CF: Is that why he'll spare a criminal at times?

Miller: He'll spare a criminal because he's not the law.

CF: He's not like the early Batman who saw himself as the judge, the jury and the executioner so to speak.

Miller: No he's not. I think that's one of the things I underscore constantly.

CF: He works very much within the legal framework.

Miller: To some degree. He is still a vigilante. He's something of a hypocrite.

CF: It's interesting to have a combination of the lawyer and the super-hero outside the law.

Miller: Yeah, the lawyer and the vigilante -- that spells hypocrite to me. The last issue of Daredevil I did was mainly focusing on that - that he lived with a number of contradictions that would remain unresolved.

CF: As you mentioned, one of the very popular characters to emerge in this series is Electra. Yet no female lead character has seemed to be able to draw that much popularity in comics.

Miller: Not in recent history. Certainly Wonder Woman for a time was a very popular character. I think it has to do with the fact that comics have become more and more boys' territory over the years. Comic book people have generally treated femal characters almost exclusively as either mother figures or sex objects or both. There is an audience out there, I believe, very hungry for female characters who are, of course sexual because hopefully most heroes would be, but also heroic in their own right.

CF: Is Amethyst the type of book that you think would bring back a female audience?

Miller: I haven't read it so I don't know. I don't think that the interest in a female character would entirely come from girls necessarily. There are a lot of male Electra fans out there.

CF: Probably mostly I would think.

Miller: No, she's a real big hit among the girls too. Quite a bit of mail and quite a bit of attention at the conventions came from girls. We'll just have to see. Everybody is trying a lot of new things now in trying to expand the audience a bit. I think romance comics could make it. I think that one of the reasons that Daredevil succeeded for a long time was because it was, among other things, a romance comic -- a psychotic romance comic, but a romance comic.

CF: I think that when Bruce Jones was doing the first Ka-Zars just recently, he seemed to be introducing that element.

Miller: Yeah, he did some delightful things with Ka-Zar.

CF: A lot of people seem to like and identify with Electra, but she seems to be a rather sick character.

Miller: Very conflicted, certainly. And very sick. Conflict is what makes the whole game interesting. The entire Daredevil/Electra was essentially a romance. That's what I think made the character succeed. Also the fact that she was attractive and in certain ways admirable. I believe that the conclusion of the series left her in a much better place than one would have expected.

CF: Don't you think that bringing her back in the way she was brought back blunted the impact of some of the earlier issues?

Miller: No, it made sense out of them, it gave them a point. It turned a sequence that could have been depressing into something that was actually optimistic. There is a great, huge predjudice against ressurection in comics, mainly because they've been done so often, so poorly. Ressurection is as eternal a mythic scene as you can find, and comic books are mythology. Saying that we shouldn't do ressurections is as limiting as saying that characters shouldn't fly because they don't in real life. Especially when we're talking about redemption through love, which is what that story was about. I'm sure that you can find many examples of that in opera and mythology.

CF: It's almost literally the rising and the advancing of the spirit.

Miller: Although it was a protracted advancing.

I CAN GIVE YOU PURPOSE, HEATHER.
I NEED YOU. ONLY RECENTLY, I'VE COME TO REALIZE HOW MUCH I NEED YOU.
THERE'S A HOLE IN ME. A GREAT BLACK HOLE THAT YOU COULD FILL.

CF: Denny O'Neil mentioned that there might be an Electra mini-series coming up. Is there any plan on your part to work on that?

Miller: There is an Electra project being discussed right now. It wouldn't happen for quite a while and all I can say is that it is being discussed. I can't really talk about it.

CF: Unlike some other people who have left Marvel, it is my impression that you left under fairly good terms.

Miller: Very good terms. I am up there from time to time. Several of my friends work there. There is no bad feeling.

CF: It's nice to hear that for once.

Miller: It was business, that's all.

CF: You got a better offer?

Miller: It was business.

CF: While you were at Marvel did you ever run into the barrier of a house style?

Miller: Not really. Obviously each editor has his own predjudices and his own beliefs, because each editor's job is to make things better. Different people have different ideas of what "better" is. Working with editors, in general, is something of a tug-of-war. Although once I started producing work that was sucessful, I was encouraged to pursue my own course as much as possible. I couldn't have asked for more encouragement in that way than what I got. I was not told to draw like John Romita or Jack Kirby at any point.

CF: Denny O'Neil is writing the **Daredevils** now. Does he stay in touch with you about it.

Miller: Oh sure, we talk things over, but it's his baby now. I'm eager to see what he's going to do with it. He was such an intrical part of the series when I was doing it that he is much more in touch with what I did on the series than anyone else could be.

CF: Klaus Jansen seems to have worked very closely with you on the series as well.

Miller: Yes, Klaus and I did work very closely. We conferred quite a bit. As the **Daredevil** project continued, he and I continued to work more closely.

CF: How much of the look of the issues while you were there was actually due to Klaus?

Miller: There was a point in the last year of **Daredevil** when I started giving him drawings on letter sized pieces of paper. The rendering and the placement of blacks became his province. Deciding who was responsible for what is very difficult; you get into a lot of grey areas. The stories were mine, the compositions were certainly mine. We're talking about two people working on the art work. It's so pointless to try to figure out who did what. i'd have to have the pages in front of me; I'd have to point to things; and even then all those little leaps in logic that happen between people would be impossible to tell you about.

CF: It seems that since you've left, Klaus has tried to keep the same sort of look to the **Daredevil** series. Do you think he's been successful with it?

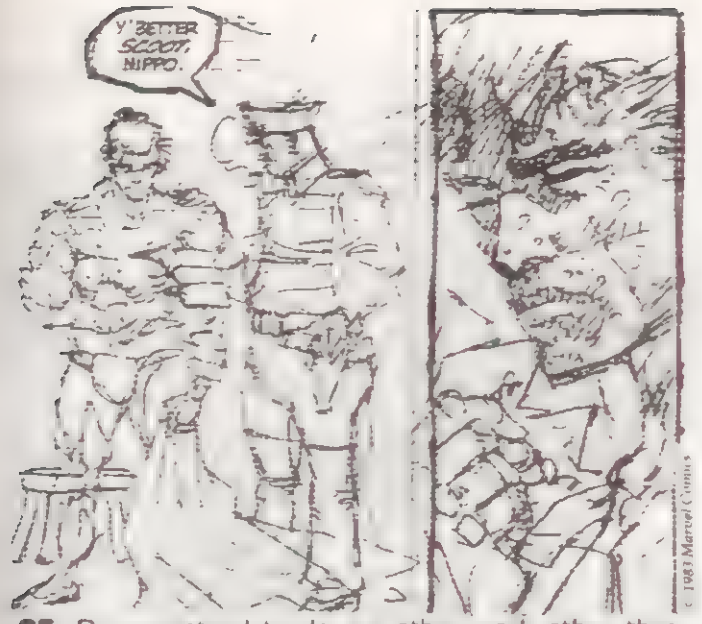
Miller: I haven't really seen that much of it. What I saw I though looked very good. He's taking on a big assignment. I admire his courage with it. It's something that I've encouraged him to do right along. I believe that Klaus's imagination and intelligence are such that he should continue to expand as much as possible.

CF: I think he's one of the real underestimated talents in the industry.

Miller: Yes, he certainly is.

CF: Are you under an exclusive arrangement with DC or are you allowed to do work for other publishers?

Miller: I'm under no exclusive arrangement except that I'm under such a schedule right now that I'm pretty much restricted to one project. I have not signed an exclusive agreement and have no intentions of ever doing so.



CF: Do you intend to do any other work other than Ronin?

Miller: Talk to me when I'm a little further into Ronin. Right now Ronin is a very demanding assignment and also a thrilling one to work on. I'm handling so many new problems and finding so many new things and working with what I regard as such a neat story that I wouldn't even want to be bothered with anything else right now.

CF: Do you own the whole concept of the character?

Miller: I can't realy go into the contract part of that. It's pretty complicated and we're opening a can of worms by talking about it.

CF: Can you tell us something about the character itself and the millieu that it will be in?

Miller: The Ronin series – I've been trying to find a way to describe it – the best way I could describe it is to say that it's a super-hero, science-fiction, samurai drama, urban nightmare, gothic romance. It's quite a complicated series. The concept of the character comes from the name, Ronin the Masterless Samurai. He's a Samurai who was cast-out by whatever lord he worked for or he somehow failed the lord in some way. It's a shameful state for a samurai to find himself in. This is not to indicate that it's a historical story at all. It takes place in fact, in the future. It's New York after the turn of the next century. The Ronin character operates in this very different world than we live in, but he is a samurai character.

CF: How does he become a samurai in future Japan? It seems that Japan has become more Westernized than that.

Miller: And the Western society has become a bit more Easternized. As far as how it all happens, that's really the story and I don't want to give it away.

CF: Is he going to be a mortal man or is he going to have particular powers?

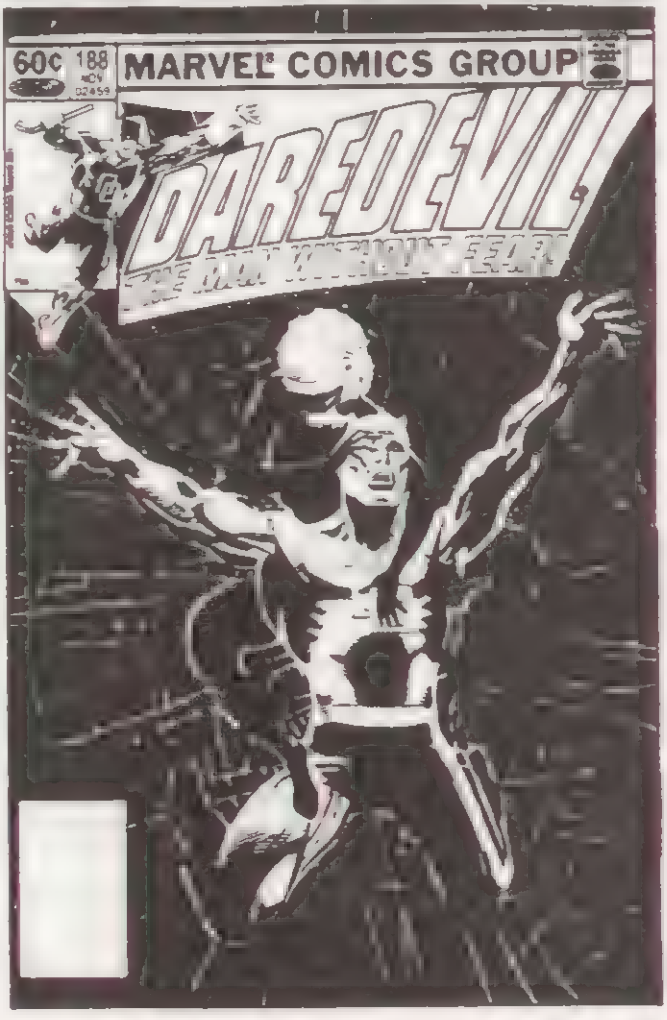
Miller: He has some extraordinary abilities and some abilities that one would associate with a samurai. One of the reasons that the description I gave of the series was so involved and apparently contradictory is that I allowed the story to be whatever it was without thinking of genre. He does qualify as a super-hero and he also qualifies as a martial artist. You would have to read it to understand.

CF: Can you tell us anything more specific about the characters that will be involved? What he'll be doing? About the villains?

Miller: I can tell you that the basic setting of the story is Manhattan Island, sometime around the year 2030, well into the most serious depression of the country's history. Much of the action takes place in a very grim deprived version of Manhattan. It makes **Daredevil** look like a party. The principal characters I would describe as being the Ronin, who I really can't talk about much, and a corporation cop named Casey, the female lead of the story. She is crucial to what goes down; she's a very important character. I'm sure that in several issues of the series she will have the main action. The villain is a transplanted demon from 800 years ago who does all kinds of nasty foul things. The entire series is an unveiling of different plot developments. To give too much away right off the bat would be to negate the whole purpose of the first issue.

CF: What has happened to the rest of the United States? Is it still there and intact?

Miller: There has been no nuclear war. There's been no cataclysm. We're talking about economics collapse and with it, for the rest of the country, all the things one would except. Thisis where the Robert Heinlein refer-



ence comes in. I've worked out my own ideas about the rest of the country, but it's very unlikely that any of it will appear anywhere in the story. America is attempting a recovery. In the Aquarius Complex, which is a new building built in Manhattan to develop new technology, there's a discovery that offers up hope for the future and also offers up the possibility of total cataclysm. As far as where the rest of the country is, it's very depressed; it's very poor; people are starving. Manhattan is one of the grimmest places in the world.

CF: Manhattan can't survive on it's own. Food has to be brought in from outside sources. Are the lines of communication to the outside world still as open?

Miller: Manhattan Island has been abandoned. The Aquarius Complex is an attempt to bring some new money in, but Manhattan Island is a barbaric land.

CF: How does it feed itself?

Miller: All kinds of discusting ways that will be made apparent.

CF: Has this been a world economic collapse or does it just affect the United States?

Miller: It's a world economic collapse. Other countries are recovering faster than the United States. The country that is in the strongest economic situation is Japan.

CF: Is Japan going to be tied into the story or does the action take place only in Manhattan? The name seems to imply that Japan is involved.

Miller: The name really refers to the hero and what the different characters go though. In this world I'm describing, all the characters are in a way ronin. They're all cast outs. They're all disenfranchised. There are several Japanese characters in the story, but almost exclusively, the action takes place in Manhattan. It's a story that happens in New York.

CF: Is this story six issues?

Miller: Six 48-page issues.

CF: Is the series designed to build up and then terminate, or is it built so that it could continue?

Miller: The series has what I can only describe as a very definite ending.

CF: There will be nothing beyond that then.

Miller: There's nothing contemplated right now.

CF: Is it open enough so that there could be?

Miller: Well, something always could be, but there's no plans along those lines. It would be difficult with what I have planned for the finish of the series.

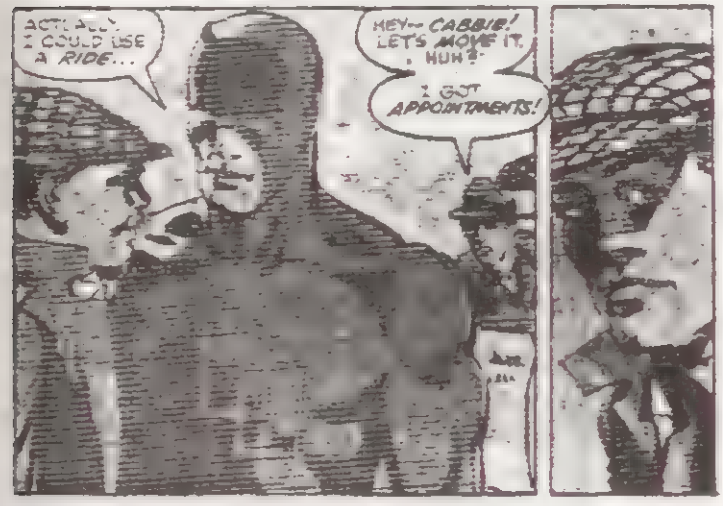
CF: I imagine you have something planned for Frank Miller beyond the 36 week run of Ronin.

Miller: Right now all I've got planned is to work as long as I can and as much as I can. I've spent a lot of time figuring out this project and I'm eager to do it. I've got tons of ideas for other things I could work on, but right now my entire focus is on this. When the time comes, I'll see what I feel like doing then.

CF: One thing you've talked of in other interviews is the concept of a very fleshy, pulpy human within the concrete caverns of a very rectangular city. Is this going to make itself evident in the Ronin series in this starved Manhattan?

SLAM
CRAK
OKAY! OKAY! SO I'LL TALK ALREADY!
WORD'S COME DOWN FROM THE TOP -- THE KINGPIN HIMSELF HAS HELD SOME KINDA SUMMIT OF THE BIG SIX -- THE TOP MOBSTERS OF THE EAST COAST TONIGHT. MIDNIGHT
LEMME PUT MY HAT ON

Miller: Almost everything about the Ronin will be different from my previous work. I'm exploring brand new ground. That sort of concept is the very thing that turns me on and gets me very involved, but the overall look of Ronin is much less stark and much more textural. Because of the way it's being printed and the way that it's being covered, I've developed a different way to render it, a different way to approach it. This is getting the finest production that you can get. Consequently everything from the writing to the art to the coloring has to be changed radically to accomodate it. It's as if I've been doing black-and-white TV movies and all of the sudden I'm doing full-color films. It's that radical a difference and for that reason it's that radical a difference in style for me.



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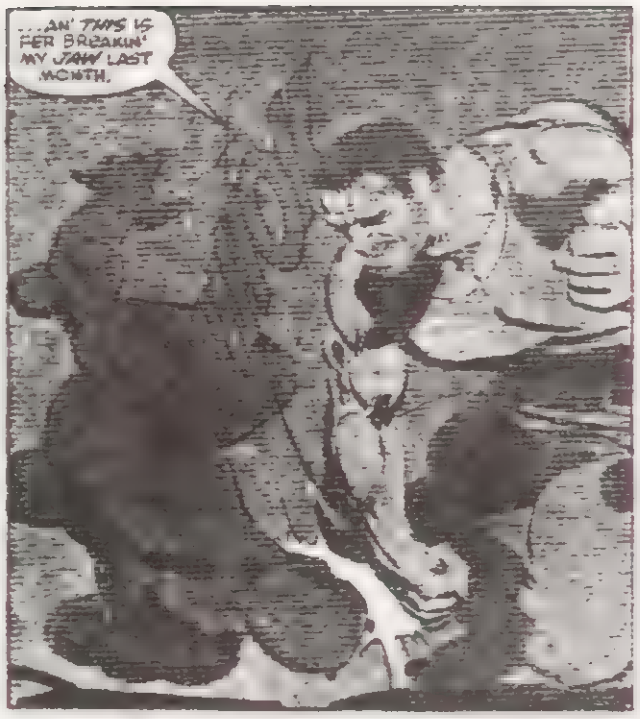
CF: Is this going to be mechanical seperations as most comics are or is this going to be full process.
Miller: Full process.
CF: It should be impressive.
Miller: Lynn Wiley is coloring. I'm very fortunate to have her working on it with me.
CF: What has she done previously?
Miller: She colored last year's **Batman Annual**, she colored my last issue of **Daredevil**, she colored the last issue of **Wolverine**. she is able to do things with color that I don't think anyone else can. She understands the process color and is able to play with it and bring things from it that startle and delight me. She's been involved very closely since the conception of this project. Her work is absolutely critical to the project. I think that generally comic book colorists themselves have not gotten much credit for what they've done. You may recall that a few years back people didn't pay much attention to inkers. Terry Austin and Klaus and a few other people convinced them otherwise. I believe that this project will, with the printing it's getting and the coloring it's getting, do the same thing and people will start noticing comic book colorists.
CF: I think that comic book coloring, because of the poor quality, not of the original work, but of what people actually see, tends to make it a background rather than a foreground.



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Miller: With normal four-color comics printed on that horrible pulp paper we're really talking about black-and-white comics that are tinted with color, because the color is so poor. What we're talking about with Ronin, we're talking about comics that, while still working with blackline art, with essentially cartoon art, as all successful comic books really are, we're talking about painted comics. Lynn is choosing from an unlimited variety of colors, rather than the sixty or so that you see in seperated color.
CF: In other words the color here is going to be an intrical part of the story.
Miller: Absolutely. I can't over-emphasize how important it is.
CF: Is anything going to be done in a special way with the lettering in this book?
Miller: John Costanza is lettering it which makes it special. He's about as good as anybody gets on that end of the job. Incidentally, the panel borders and balloons are all being done by me and you'll find that I'm using them in ways that they haven't been used. Different scenes have different looks, right down to the type of line used on the panel borders.
CF: Since you're working with the text, right down to doing the balloons, are you going to be using the wording as a major element in controlling the piece?
Miller: That's a big chunk of the entire game there. Comic books are meant to be read. Comic books are a form of literature before anything else. I worked very hard on the words; they're very important.
CF: I meant using words for pacing. Some pages are meant to move very quickly so you use very few words there and others are meant to go slowly so you place more words there to slow the reader down. That sort of thing.
Miller: Of course, when a scene relies on dialogue, the dialogue becomes the most important part of it. When I

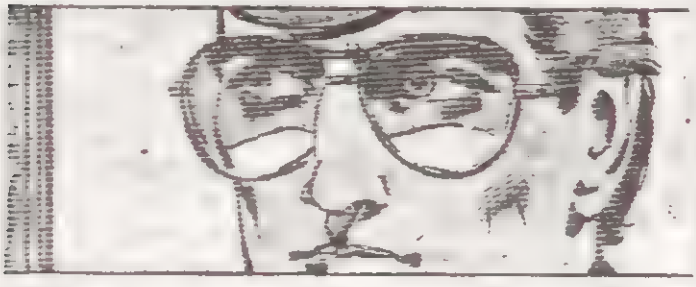
do a dialogue scene, I tend to lay the words in before I even draw anything because the words are so much more important than anything else. I'm using words in many ways – all in word balloons incidentally; there are no captions or thought balloons in the entire series. I'm trying some of my theories out and seeing what will happen.

CF: That's almost on the level of the television or movie type of style, where you can't read the characters' minds and there are certainly no captions.

Miller: It's making me do a much better job of telling the story. The goal is to create as complete an illusion as possible. To create an illusion you have to create a sense of being there. When I am in a situation with someone, I can't see everything that's going on, I certainly can't read other people's thoughts and there is no overdubbed voice telling me what's going on. I have to correlate that with my brain. I'm asking the readers to do the same thing, to look at the pictures well enough to see what's in them because there won't be any box at the top that tells them.

CF: Is the Ronin character going to be a costumed character?

Miller: He has a costume; it doesn't appear for a while, but he does have a costume.



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CF: Other than his normal clothes?

Miller: Well, he doesn't really have any normal clothes. He doesn't have a skin tight costume if that's what you mean.

CF: And he doesn't take a pair of glasses and put them on and say, "Hi, now I'm in my secret identity."

Miller: No secret identity.

CF: I think the unfortunate part is that it's too early for you to tell me as much as I'm looking for about the series.

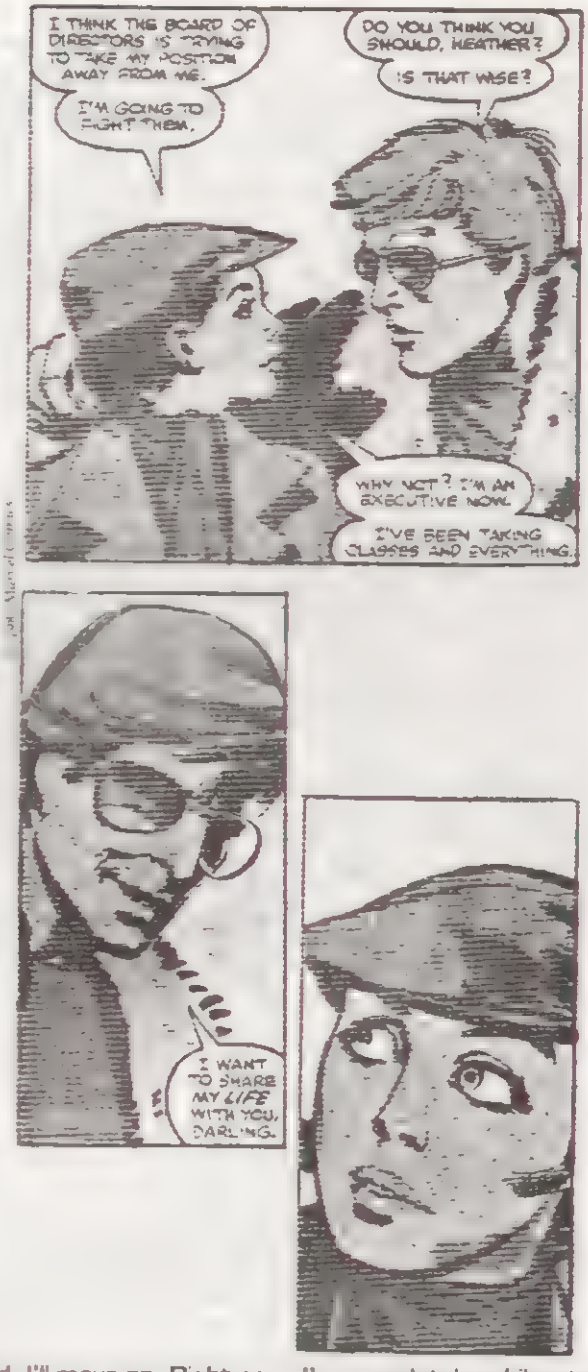
Miller: A lot of the things I'm doing really depend on things being revealed as they happen. I wouldn't want to give too much away. That's not my style anyway. I think comic book people tend to talk too much and I'm not going to give anything away that I want to be a surprise.

CF: Do you plan on staying in comics for your career?

Miller: Right now I can't think of anything I'd rather do. My interest is more intense than it's ever been. It's increased every year. I feel that I'm just starting to explore what I want to explore and to learn what I need to learn. I'm a comic artist for the duration as far as things look now.

CF: No animation or anything like that?

Miller: You never know what's going to happen. If I get


I THINK THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IS TRYING TO TAKE MY POSITION AWAY FROM ME.
I'M GOING TO FIGHT THEM.
DO YOU THINK YOU SHOULD, HEATHER?
IS THAT WISE?
WHY NOT? I'M AN EXECUTIVE NOW.
I'VE BEEN TAKING CLASSES AND EVERYTHING.
I WANT TO SHARE MY LIFE WITH YOU, DARLING.

bored, I'll move on. Right now, I'm completely exhilarated by this stuff. Especially now, especially working on Ronin.

CF: How much of the Ronin first issue have you completed.

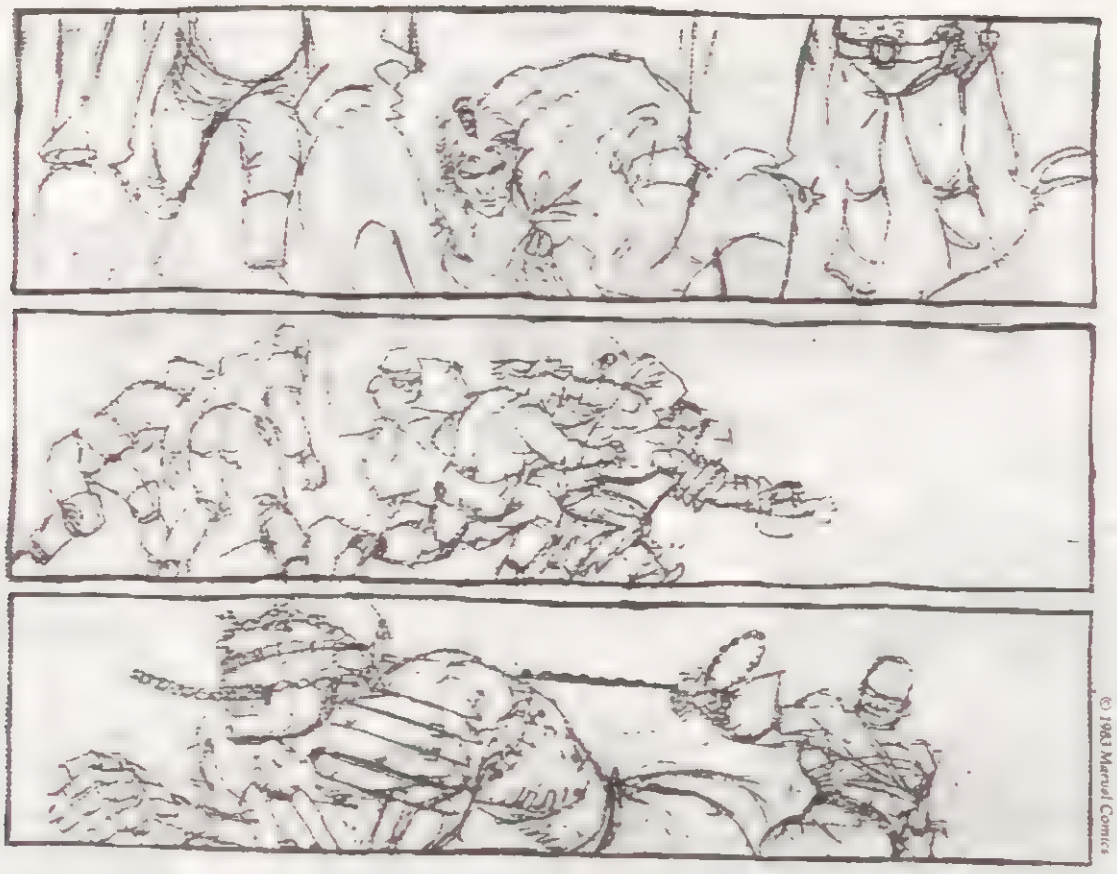
Miller: The first issue is complete. I'm presently inking the second issue.

CF: So that's almost done as well then?

Miller: It will be done in a few weeks, yes.

CF: I don't mean to be antagonistic, but there's just so much that I want to know about.

Miller: There's only so much I can talk about and only so much I want to talk about. I think professionals do that too. One of the reasons why I have refused to talk about business in an interview. First off, I believe that business is something between two parties and it really isn't any of anybody else's business. Second, I believe that many pro-



fessionals have tried to turn business into an area of public combat and that's not where it belongs.

CF: I also think that the professionals have tried to use the fan press and public pressure to get themselves an edge in their negotiations with the companies.

Miller: That's not a very good way to do business or a very effective one.

CF: The reason I asked you about ownership of the Ronin character is that, from what I understand, it is the only character that a creator has been able to own at DC and Marvel has the whole Epic line. I'm curious to know if DC is doing anything to respond to that or not.

Miller: The answer to that would be very long and it's stuff I can't really get into. We're talking about stuff that there's been a lot of talk about. However, I think the companies that don't concede the very important issue are going to find themselves eventually either out of business or producing some of the most banal material available. It's that crucial an issue because the creative people deserve to own their own material and they know it now. It's going to be very difficult to run a business without conceding that.

CF: Joe Staton told me recently that any creative person who has established himself is foolish to work on someone else's properties. He should be pushing his own properties because there is so many benefits to that.

Miller: We're not going to live forever doing the same old characters from the 1960s. Really the entire mythology that's in existance today is nearly 20 years old. Very little of what was created then is going to survive much longer because it's so far removed from present day experience. We need new properties or we just won't have an industry.

CF: Isn't it possible to pump blood back into them like John Byrne has done with the Fantastic Four or like you yourself did with Daredevil?

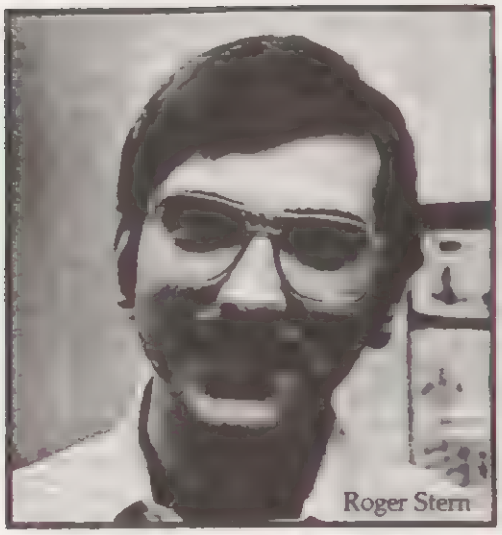
Miller: I think it is possible. I think that it's something that will be done from time to time. We can revive old ones for a long time, but we need new ones. We need to have the pool of characters increased. We need this generation of artists — I mean, why should this generation of artists not contribute something new? The freelancers, by and large, as well as the companies know that their survival is dependent on new properties. Now we have a generation of artists who are certainly at least as talented as the ones who went before, but they have the ones who went before as an example. I don't think there's anyone out there now who want's to be a — who wants to put his blood into a project and not retain som financial interest in it.

CF: You don't want to end up in poverty twenty years down the road when you stop drawing. And that happens.

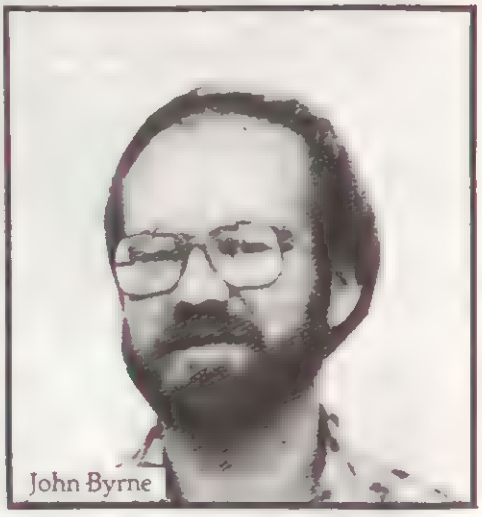
Miller: Of course it happens. It's happened a discusting amount of times. If this generation doesn't take that into account, we're a bunch of idiots.

THE CAPTAIN AMERICA

THAT NEVER WAS!



all characters ©1981 Marvel Comics Group



Many **CAPTAIN AMERICA** fans were bitterly disappointed when the book's popular creative team, Roger Stern and John Byrne, announced they had decided to leave the book. Both creators were unhappy about leaving the series since they had both enjoyed both revitalizing the series's concept and the enthusiastic reader response which resulted from their work. Unfortunately Stern's decision to leave the series due to scheduling demands ended his participation with the book as of the fortieth anniversary issue, **CAPTAIN AMERICA #255.** John Byrne subsequently decided to leave the book as well if Stern was no longer writing the series.

The creators' decision to leave the title dashed many readers' hopes of seeing further Stern-Byrne stories. However what most fans did *not* know was that one last Stern-Byrne story had already been begun and partially pencilled before the two men decided to move on to other projects. Six pages of what would have been **CAPTAIN AMERICA #257** were plotted and pencilled and have remained unpublished until now.

According to Roger Stern, he and Byrne and planned on an elaborate three-issue storyline which would have begun in #257. Stern had come up with a plot which finally accounted for many of the characters introduced and last seen during Jack Kirby's last stint on the book. Donna Maria Santiago, Hector Santiago a.k.a. The Swine, Arnim Zola, Doughboy, and the Red Skull would each have made appearances in the story.

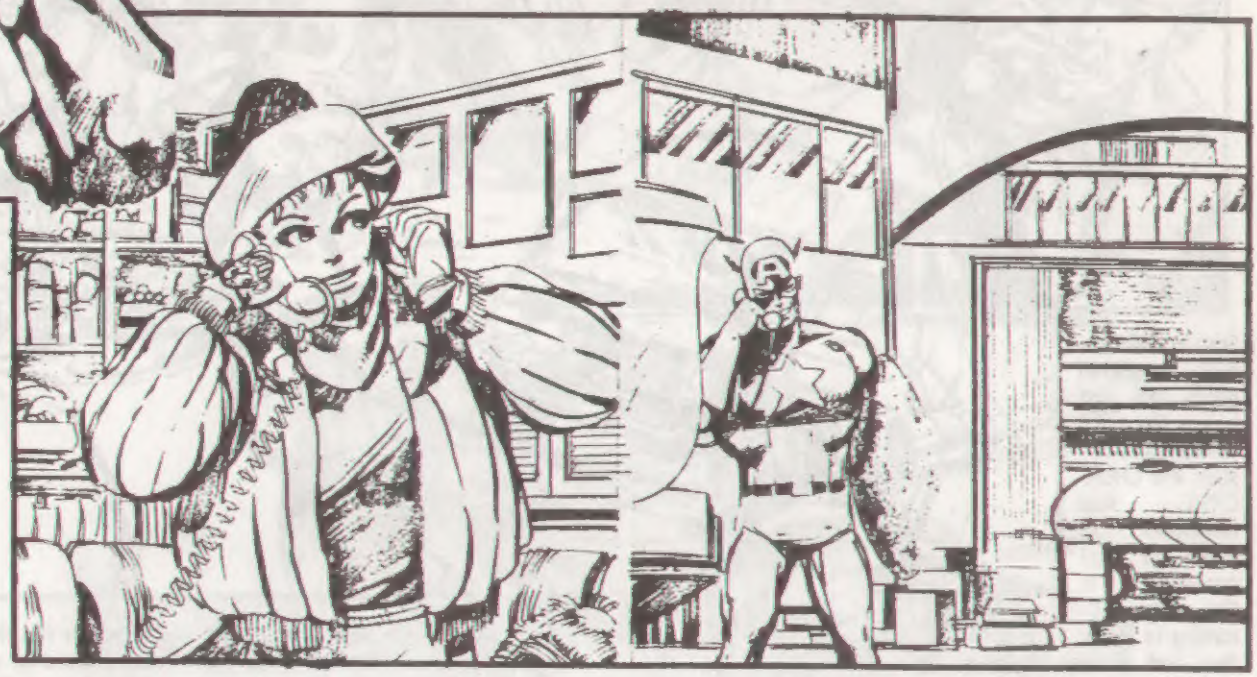
Stern and Byrne had planned to picked up where they had left off in issue #255. Captain America would still be in England following his battle with the revived Baron Blood and his reunion with former Invaders member, Lady Jacqueline a.k.a. Spitfire. Issue #257 would have seen Cap leave England via an experimental solar-powered dirigible, the CHURCHILL. *En route* back to the States, Cap would have been subjected to a series of mysterious attacks. Ultimately the readers would have discovered that the attacks had been masterminded by Hector Santiago, The Swine, last seen being eaten by a monster in issue #208 and believed dead since then. Stern would have revealed that Arnim Zola, the bizarre bio-fanatic, had cloned a second Hector Santiago from the shredded remains of the first. Arnim himself, accompanied by his creations Primus and Doughboy, would have made an surprise appearence at the end of the first issue in time to kidnap Cap from the dirigible. The Red Skull would have ultimately put in an appearance. Stern and Byrne had concocted an elaborate act of international terrorism planned by the Red Skull to be the conclusion to the three-part story.

Unfortunately, none of Stern's and Byrne's plans for the book will see print. The book's editor Jim Salicrup stated that "it [was] very unlikely that any of their plans [would] be carried out."

The following pages contain several scenes from the six pages that were partially finished last summer. None of the material was inked before Stern and Byrne left the series so these scenes are shot from Byrne's finished pencils. The running commentary and plot synopsis is drawn from Stern's script. This is a rare opportunity to see what the two men would have done with the series if they had not left the book.

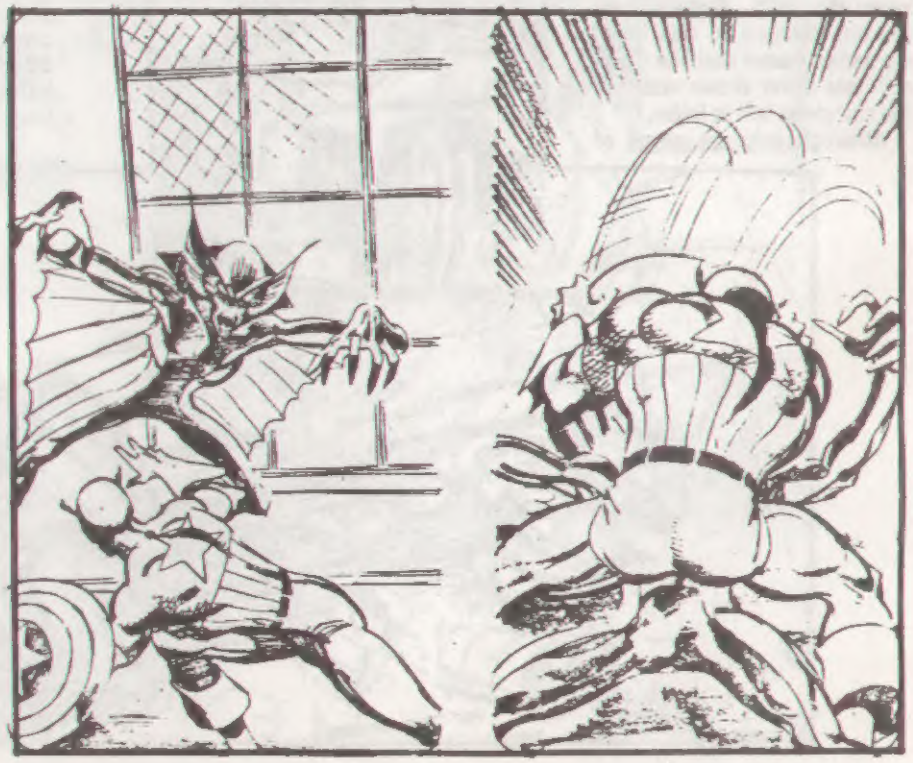
#257 would have begun with a phone call. Cap, already at London's Heathrow airport, would have called Bernadette Rosenthal via the trans-Atlantic telephone system. The second page (from which these panels are taken) begins with Cap actually connecting with Bernie. A brief exchange of pleasantries follows during which Cap explains that he should be arriving back in New York soon. Cap rings off as he is approached by his three companions, Lady Jacqueline, her son Ken, and his friend Joey Chapman.

While these first two pages lack any action scenes, they still provide the reader with a great deal of very important background information. Due to the break in continuity caused by issue #255, the special 40th anniversary celebration, the the reader had to be brought up to date as to the time and place of #257. The phone call to Bernie allowed Stern to not only remind the readers that Cap was still in England but also that the action of #257 takes place almost immediately after the action in #255. Page three featured a flashback to the battle with Baron Blood that formed the climax of issue #255. Stern also paced the story to allow for a number of "talking heads" panels (not pictured) which allowed him to explore the possibility of Joey Chapman assuming the role of Union Jack. Again Stern was very careful to catch the reader up with what had happened in the two-part Baron Blood story and to tidy up any loose ends that might still have been left over from the conclusion of issue #255.



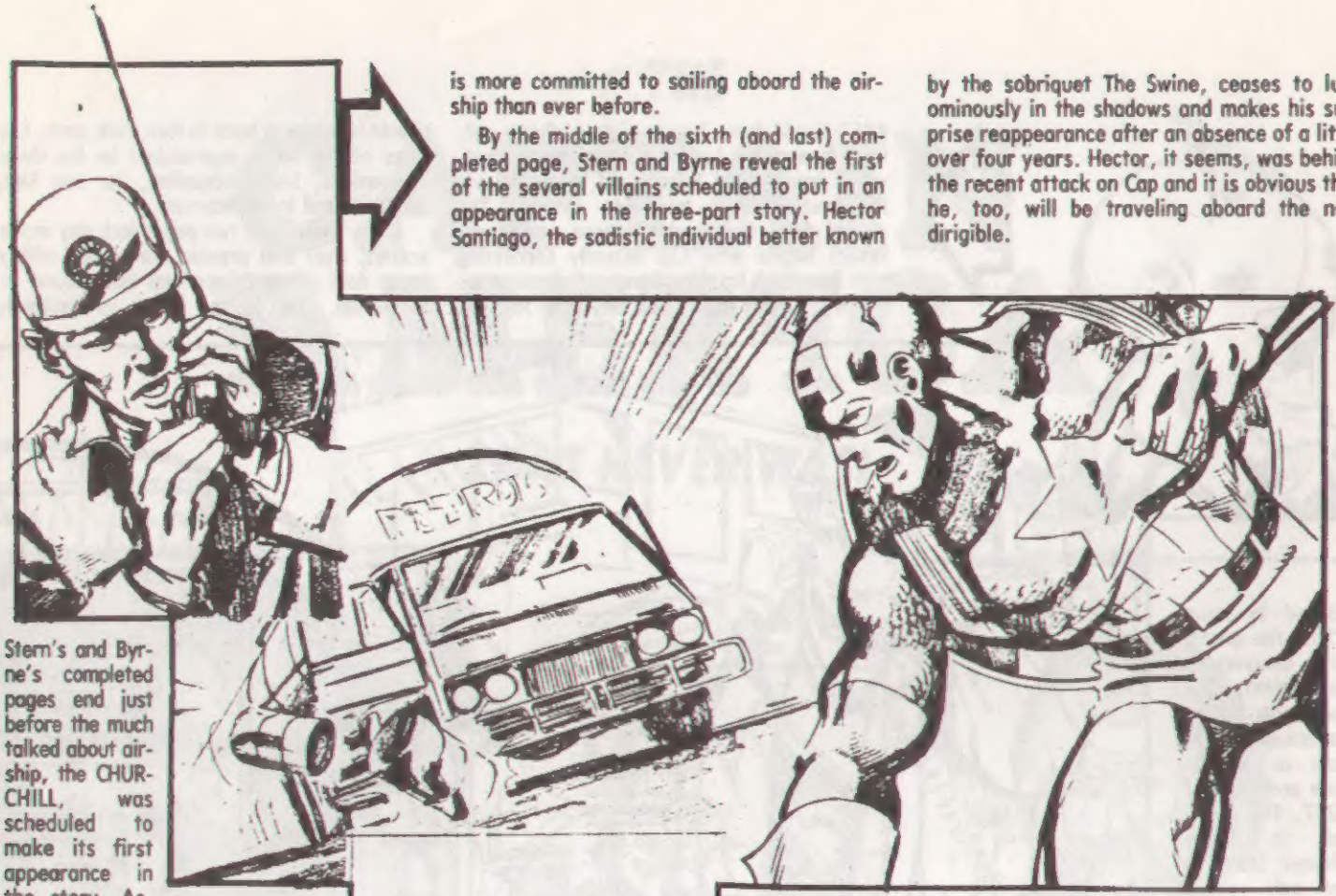
Page four would have been the real beginning of the proposed three-part Hector Santiago-Arnim Zola-Red Skull plot. The top of the page features a three panel sequence where unidentified men plot to kill Cap and his companions by means of a runaway fuel truck. Naturally enough by the beginning of page six, Cap has managed to rescue Lady Jacqueline from being crushed by the out-of-control vehicle, to steer the truck away from any endangered people or buildings, and to force the truck to collide into a conviently placed near-by barrier wall. Byrne ended page five with a very satisfying explosion as the truck careens into the wall. The beginning of page six, however, offers the reader visual reassurance that Cap managed to leap to safety mere moments before the truck impacted against the wall. However, despite all this activity, Stern managed to impart some much-needed information to the reader. Cap, it seems, was scheduled to return to the United States via a free trip aboard the maiden voyage of a new type of airship. Cap's participation in the air-cruise was arranged by an unknown party and it's possible that his participation in the voyage would have been an important part of the Red Skull's latest plot against the world.

The attempt on Cap's life, however, causes the Avenger to believe that someone is trying to sabotage the new airship, and as a result he



is more committed to sailing aboard the airship than ever before.

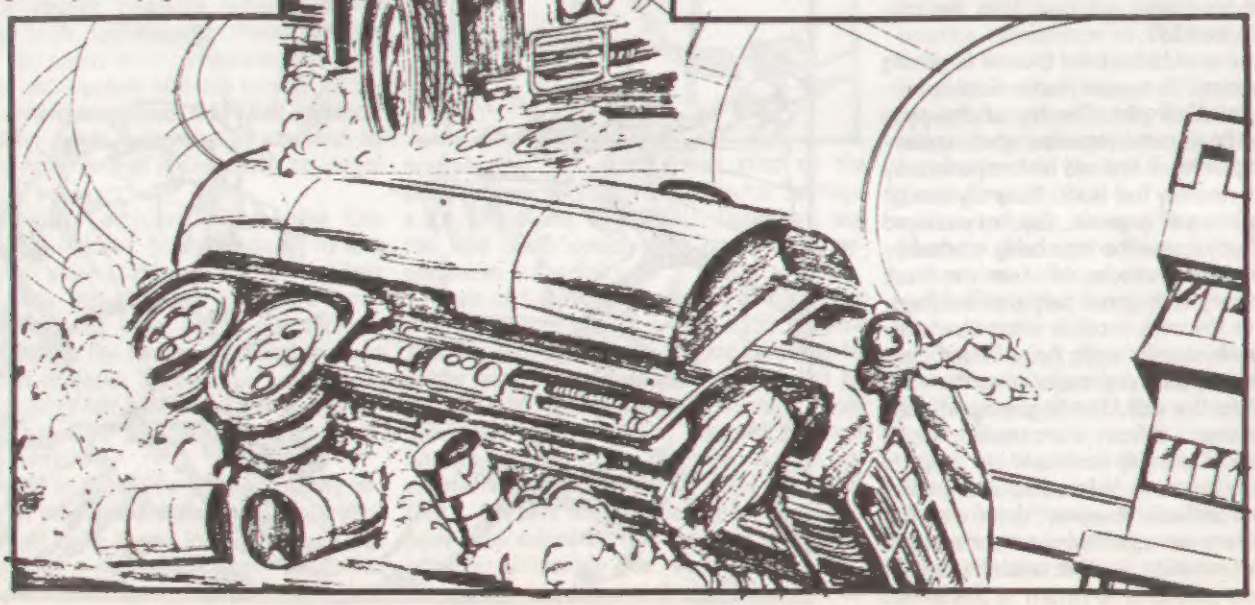
By the middle of the sixth (and last) completed page, Stern and Byrne reveal the first of the several villains scheduled to put in an appearance in the three-part story. Hector Santiago, the sadistic individual better known by the sobriquet The Swine, ceases to lurk ominously in the shadows and makes his surprise reappearance after an absence of a little over four years. Hector, it seems, was behind the recent attack on Cap and it is obvious that he, too, will be traveling aboard the new dirigible.



Stern's and Byrne's completed pages end just before the much talked about airship, the CHURCHILL, was scheduled to make its first appearance in the story. According to Stern, they had planned to have the seventh page be a dramatic full-page shot of the thousand-foot-long, solar powered dirigible. Byrne had been just about to start work on the page when Stern announced his intention to leave the strip. Byrne's subsequent decision to also leave the series meant that the Churchill was never drawn and that the story was left in limbo.

Although only six pages of pencils had been completed for the three-part series, Byrne had already worked up a number of models and costume sketches related to the three-part story. The Red Skull's new psuedo-S.S. uniform (based upon a suggestion by Cory Vandernet) on our cover is one of these. had

Stern's and Byrne's departure from the book ended any chance that their elaborate storyline would ever see print as a Marvel comic. Fortunately for fans of their work, ***COMICS FEATURE*** was allowed to reveal the hither-to untold tale of the ***CAPTAIN AMERICA*** issue that would have been.●



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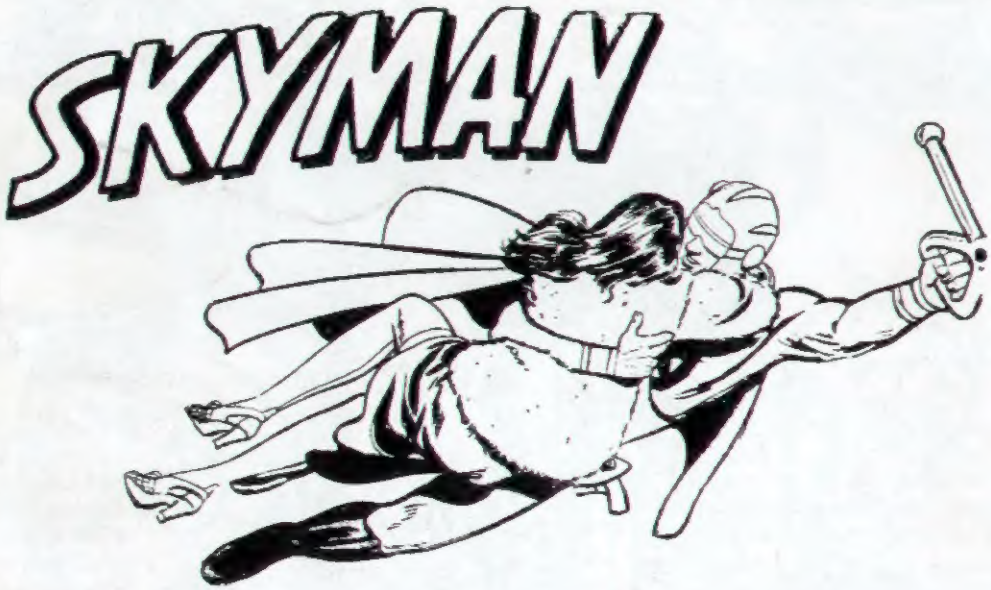

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